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**In what ways do the perceptions of connectedness of Māori students in Alternative Education secondary schools affect their self-efficacy within the learning environment?**

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submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree

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## **Abstract**

This study has sought to identify connectedness for Māori students within the alternative-education, learning environment and the effect this has had on their self-efficacy. Alternative education in New Zealand is described as a place where second chance learners have access to education (Alternative Education National Body New Zealand, 2016). Generally, students are referred to alternative education due to becoming habitual truants, while other students are deemed as behaviourally-challenging, and are consequently excluded from school (Education Review Office, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2016a). A Critical Theory approach was employed guided by Kaupapa Māori methodology. Data was collected using the qualitative methods of focus-group interviews and one-to-one semi-structured interviews. An open-coded approach was adopted to analyse the data from the interview transcripts where themes were selected, and a summary reflection was written.

Three distant themes were identified during the data analysis phase: Tāhuhu Kōrero – Kura; Alternative Education – Kura; and Alternative Education Teaching and Learning Approaches. Within these themes sub-themes were explored: perceptions and experiences of primary and secondary school; Māori in mainstream education; the referring schools involvement; misconceptions; connection to the alternative-education, learning environment; centre and teacher practices; connection with Māori; and pathways, mana, and self-efficacy. An important aspect of this study was to seek to understand these students' prior educational experiences before gathering their narratives on the alternative-education, learning environment. This was a strength of the study as the student narratives on their entire educational journey provided a depth of understanding for the researcher, and went towards explaining their disconnection, how it happened, and gave context to their referral to alternative education.

The student narratives expressed a strong sense of connection to their primary-school, learning environment, however, a complete disconnection to their

secondary-school, learning environment. Students expressed feeling discriminated against for being Māori, that there was no empathy or understanding given to their lived realities despite wanting to succeed at school. They felt that their teachers did not make an effort to connect with them describing a power imbalance between the teachers and themselves. The students felt that expectations were low, and that teachers could not be bothered to help them with their work. The student participants attributed this disconnection to the reason for their truancy and behavioural issues. The student narratives on the alternative-education, learning environment described an environment that was: whānau; where teachers worked at a connection and understood their learners; challenging them academically; where the teachers were highly committed to their students; where trust and respect was built; and where one size did not fit all - flexibility was exercised. Students felt that the alternative-education, learning environment provided them with career ambition, and academic confidence resulting in self-efficacy.

This study provides student voice from a group that was not included within the Te Kotahitanga research project (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003). To hear the voice of alternative education students is important in seeking to improve educational success and enjoyment for Māori priority learners. If we get to know and understand what works for these priority learners, we can then work towards making a difference for them within mainstream education. This study aims to identify the importance of connectedness for Māori students and how connectedness will positively affect Māori learners and their self-efficacy.

*Kia mau ki tō Māoritanga.*

*Hold fast to your Māori culture.*

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*Kia mau koe ki ngā kupu o ou tūpuna.  
Hold fast to the words of your ancestors.*

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*Waiho i te toipoto, kaua i te toiroa.  
Let us keep close together, not far apart.*

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*Ko Pouerua te Maunga.*  
*Ko Waitangi me Waiaruhe e nga Awa.*  
*Ko Ngatokimatawhaorua te Waka.*  
*Ko Ngāpuhi te Iwi.*  
*Ko Ngarehauata toku Hapū.*  
*Ko Oromahoe te Marae.*  
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# Chapter 1: Introduction Chapter

## Whakataukī

*Nā tō rourou nā taku rourou – ka ora ai te iwi.*

*With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive.*

## Overview

This chapter outlines the background of this study, giving context to my personal motivation. The research question and aim are discussed before an overview of the thesis is provided.

## Personal Motivation

Growing up, my mother and father both identified as Māori and knew that they descended from Māori blood lines, however, they did not have links to their iwi and were not strong in their whakapapa. Over the years both of my parents made efforts to get to know their genealogy, and registered to their respective iwi. I remember having conversations with my *Māori looking* father about how he felt like a second-class citizen in his own whenua, and how he learnt to survive in a white world. A white world where he had to forgo his culture and language, as this was forced upon him by the education system and society. He has faced racism in his time – too many stories to discuss here.

I vividly remember my sister growing up being embarrassed to look Māori, and her questioning dad about why she was *brown* and why I was *white*. My sister disliked being referred to as a 'little Māori girl'. On the other hand my mother who looks white, and whose father represented the Māori All Blacks in 1956 recounts a different experience, that of a privileged white person who did not face racial discrimination – but saw it around her as she grew up in South Auckland.

We are a family of four, two who have Māori features and skin tone, and two who look very European, however, all four come from strong Māori blood-lines. Our family had the same morals, values and roof over our heads, however, had and still have such different experiences and treatment by society. This only confirms that racism still exists, and has existed for over a century in New Zealand. My experiences both personally, seeing the effects of racism on my close family members, and in school seeing how Māori around me were treated, led me to become an educator: An educator passionate about Māori learners.

After 10 years teaching in the mainstream secondary school system, witnessing many Māori students being failed by our educators and education system, I followed my passion and took up a position managing an alternative education centre. Identifying as Māori myself has always led me to explore educational settings that work for Māori students, to inquire into what could be changed to improve the educational experiences for Māori youth. Combining these passions has led me to undertake this study. I have witnessed students referred to alternative education from their secondary school labelled by their teachers as some of the *roughest adolescents*. In a matter of weeks at the alternative education centre these same students were achieving academically and socially - with a new-found love for learning.

It has been important for me to gather the voices of alternative education students' as I feel that their voice can add to the works of Te Kotahitanga, He Kākano, and Kia Eke Panuku.

### **Research Question and Aim**

This thesis examines the perspectives of Māori adolescents and their experience of secondary schooling. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), Mutch (2005), Nisbet (2005), and Smith (1999) highlight that quality research has an aim, a purpose and an outcome. The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of connectedness of Māori students in the alternative-education, learning environment, and the affect that this environment has had on their self-efficacy.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the reasons behind the high numbers of Māori student referrals to alternative education, and where the loss of connection was in their schooling experience. The desired outcome of this study would be to have the student voice help affect change for future Māori learners, and that the findings from this study are used to help improve learning environments, promoting a change in educational policies (Bishop, 2005, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Cohen et al. (2011) and Mutch (2005) argue that for studies to be considered research they need to create new knowledge, or add to previous knowledge that will benefit the educational community. Creswell (2002) further supports this statement by stating that research must address a problem, an issue, or a situation that needs to be changed. This study will enhance previous knowledge and research conducted by Te Kotahitanga and He Kākano research teams, by adding student voice from an alternative education centre. The findings from this study will add knowledge to the alternative education research space, and may contribute to the ongoing dialogue around policy changes.

## **Thesis Overview**

There are five chapters within this thesis, with each chapter forming its piece in drawing together this study. Chapter one discusses my personal motivation for this study, research question, and aim as well as providing an overview of the thesis.

Chapter two comprises of a literature review, the literature review is relatively unique in that it does not solely focus on the themes that fall out of the research question. Instead, it follows the suggested Kaupapa Māori principles for research (Cram, 2006; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Smith, 1999). The Literature review begins with a *Historical Context* section, followed by *The Education Debt* section. These sections cover a structural analysis of the historical, political, social and economic determinants (Cram, 2006; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Smith, 1999) before the exploration of key themes. The key themes that follow are discussed

within the following sections: Te Kotahitanga; Culturalist Models of Mind and Māori Models of Learning; Connectedness; and Alternative Education.

Chapter three speaks to the methodology and research methods used in shaping this study, the theoretical framework, engaging the participants, collecting the data, the approach used in interpreting the data, and the writing of the thesis. Chapter four presents the findings and discussion from the data collected combined with the discussion. This approach of combining data representation with discussion was the most fitting for this study as it allowed for more coherence (Cohen et al., 2011). The findings are discussed under three main themes relevant to both the research question and summary themes of the data collected. These themes are: Tāhuhu Kōrero – Kura; Alternative Education – Kura; and Alternative Education Teaching and Learning Approaches. Chapter five draws conclusions in answering the research question, discusses limitations, and provides recommendations for future research and inquiry.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Whakataukī

*Mā te tini, mā mano, ka rapa te whai.*

*By many, by thousands, the work will be accomplished.*

### Overview

This chapter begins with an introduction to the research question and its positioning within the research space. The literature review follows recommended Kaupapa Māori research principles beginning with a review of the historical context, and discussion of an education debt. Following these themes Te Kotahitanga is introduced discussing its history, and looking in depth at the teacher professional development that was born from this particular study. Culturalist models of mind and Māori models of learning follow the theme of Te Kotahitanga, as they closely link and add further detail in understanding Māori learners. Connectedness is discussed from a Māori worldview with an overview of alternative education to conclude.

### Introduction

The research question: In what ways do the perceptions of connectedness of Māori students in Alternative Education secondary schools affect their self-efficacy within the learning environment? was constructed in such a way that would enable the voices of Māori students attending an alternative-education, learning environment to be represented. The purpose of this study is to examine, while giving opportunity for the voices of students who were overlooked during Te Kotahitanga, He Kākano and Kia Eke Panuku research projects. This study aims to represent the alternative education student perspective and lived experiences of education, focusing on the alternative-education, learning environment. In examining these students voice there is hope that their voice will be used in

further research to help improve secondary school, learning environments for Māori. The outcome of this study may be of interest to researchers within the indigenous education field, as well as classroom teachers wanting to learn how to engage with their disconnected Māori students.

The Ministry of Education (2016a) describes alternative education as being another option, other than secondary school, to ensure that all students have the opportunity to engage and succeed in education. Students who attend alternative education predominately come from two sets of circumstances. The first set having had negative experiences in school, which has led them to becoming habitual truants. While the second set are deemed as behavioural challenging and are consequently excluded from school (Ministry of Education, 2016a). Alternative education aims to provide constructive alternative delivery of education for these students, in a nurturing environment, with high expectations of student potential (Ministry of Education, 2016a).

Research into alternative-education, learning environments in New Zealand is *very limited* and yet we send our most vulnerable students and priority learners into these environments (Education Review Office, 2010, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2009a). Despite the amount of educational research and implementations that have focused on improving mainstream learning environments, and the academic success for Māori learners, the secondary school environment is still not working for a particular group of Māori learners (Ministry of Education, 2009b). Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai and Richardson (2003) focused their Te Kotahitanga action research on the voices of year 9 and 10 Māori students within mainstream learning environments. However, year 9 and 10 students who were still on their mainstream school rolls, but attending alternative education centres, were overlooked. Adding Māori alternative education student voice to the ongoing dialogue of improving the secondary school learning environment, and success rates of Māori students will be both timely, and valuable as it may provide a different aspect to consider.

The literature review for this study will be relatively unique in that it will not solely focus on the themes that fall out of the research question. Instead, it will follow the suggested Kaupapa Māori principles for research (Cram, 2006; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Smith, 1999). The Literature review begins with a *Historical Context* section, followed by *The Education Debt* section. These sections will cover a structural analysis of the historical, political, social and economic determinants (Cram, 2006; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Smith, 1999) before the exploration of key themes. The key themes that follow are discussed within these sections: Te Kotahitanga; Culturalist Models of Mind and Māori Models of Learning; Connectedness; and Alternative Education.

Research using a Kaupapa Māori Methodology is research that is undertaken by Māori, for Māori, with Māori, with the important aspect being that the research is to seek to understand and represent Māori, as Māori (Cram, 2009; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Smith, 1999). It is important that this study is valid, first and foremost, within the Māori context, and gives rationale for the inclusion of the sections on *Historical Context* and *The Education Debt* (Cram, 2006; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Smith, 1999).

Cram (2006) states that Kaupapa Māori researchers have two roles:

*Firstly, researchers need to affirm the importance of Māori self-definitions and self-valuations. Second, researchers need to critique Pākehā/colonial constructions and definitions of Māori and articulate solutions to Māori concerns in terms of Māori knowledge. These dual agendas are intertwined; for example, the critique of Pākehā common sense makes space for the expression of an alternate, Māori common sense (p.34).*

Kaupapa Māori research is about the centring and legitimatisation of Māori realities and the Māori world. Kaupapa Māori research must take into account the history of Māori experiences with non-Māori researchers, and how Māori have been denied sovereignty within these processes (Katoa, 2016). This thesis will be guided throughout by Kaupapa Māori research principles, ensuring the



centring and legitimatisation of Māori realities and Māori worldview (Cram, 2006; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Smith, 1999).

## **Historical Context**

On February the 6<sup>th</sup> 1840 the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. It is believed by Māori that the signing of the treaty document was poignant to the British political goal, which was the assimilation of the New Zealand indigenous people to the British worldview (Bishop, 2005; Orange, 2013; Walker, 1975). On this day in 1840, the British government gained sovereignty over New Zealand and for well over a century, the Treaty, as it was translated to Māori was not upheld (Bishop, 2005, 2010; Walker, 1975). It has been well documented that the British stripped Māori of their mana and culture through enforcing British governance; the use of British politics, education and law on New Zealand's indigenous people, disregarding Māori culture, their way and their beliefs (Bishop, 2005; Calman, 2015; Orange, 2013; Pearson, 2012; Walker, 1975).

However, it has also been documented that the British *felt* that they provided New Zealand's indigenous people (Māori), through British education, British law, modern medicine and British 'civilised' society - sociocultural profit (Fox, 1842). Fox (1842) encouraged emigration from the United Kingdom to New Zealand due to overcrowded living conditions, high rates of sickness and death, and the high rate of unemployment in the United Kingdom. He encouraged emigration as he felt that British citizens could have a better quality of life in New Zealand due to the climate, productiveness of the land, space, and prospective job opportunities (Fox, 1842).

Some could argue the premeditated motives of British colonisation, and others could argue the good intentions of the British. The reality of the situation is that there are two worldviews and two lived realities to consider. One is the worldview and lived realities and experiences of Māori; who feel stripped of their culture, whenua (land), and governance through the colonisation of British citizens to New Zealand (Bishop, 2005, 2008; Orange, 2013; Walker, 1975). The

other is the worldview and lived experiences of the British; the British may have felt that they were improving the position of their people, by exploration and inhabitation of other countries (Fox, 1842). Fox (1842) encouraged the *common man* to emigrate, as they would be able to escape the *straitened circumstances* that oppressed them in the United Kingdom. Therefore, an initial critique of early colonial writing supports the good intentions of the British and their colonisation of New Zealand.

Further review of the literature strongly supports the negative effects of early British emigration to New Zealand, and the long lasting affects this has had on generations of Māori people. The not so pure colonisation intentions are brought forth through literature that evidenced years of British domination and assimilation (Bishop, 2005, 2008, 2010; Orange, 2013; Walker, 1975). The British brought with them their own Eurocentric worldviews and forcefully imposed these worldviews on Māori, through violence, war, and suppression of language and culture (Bishop, 2010; Orange, 2013; Walker, 1975). It is evidenced through post Treaty writing that British governance and people were working towards replicating a British society here in New Zealand (Bishop, 2005; Orange, 2013; Walker, 1975).

A common theme in historical texts is the *British agenda*, the obvious documented goal was to dilute Māori people and assimilate the two cultures to the British worldview (Bishop, 2005; Orange, 2013; Walker, 1975). British people viewed themselves as the superior race, this is quite telling in their writings and descriptions of Māori people (Bishop, 2005). The British settlers colonising New Zealand wanted to be able to live in peace, own land and prosper economically from the environment. They believed that to be able to do this they would need to gain control over Māori people, to be able to enforce their societal laws and ways of living and operating (Bishop, 2005; Fox, 1842; Orange, 2013; The Committee of the Aborigines' Protection Society, 1846; Walker, 1975).

New Zealand's history has been one of politics, social and economic domination by the British majority, and marginalization of the Māori people, through the

removal and disregard of the agreed partnership, loyalty and power-sharing that the treaty was supposed to offer (Bishop, 2005, 2008; Keenan, 2015; Orange, 2013; Pearson, 2012; Walker, 1975). For more than 150 years Māori have been subjected to an education system geared to advantage Pākehā learners, their culture and their language, while in turn disadvantaging Māori learners, their culture and their language. Māori to this day have continued to be plagued by educational, social, economic, and political disparities in their own country (Bishop, Berryman, & Wearmouth, 2014). There has been extreme social injustice for the indigenous people of New Zealand as they have not been able to fully benefit from participation in a modern nation state (Bishop, 2005; Bishop et al., 2014).

The introduction of a British education system that did not embrace or acknowledge Māori culture has had damaging effects on Māori social, economic, and educational success. This contributes to explaining the current economic gap, which directly relates to qualification disparities, and inequities in education between Māori and non-Māori (Pearson, 2012). Over the more recent decades the divide between New Zealand's poorest and wealthiest inhabitants has widened at alarming rates. Income inequality is a crisis – differences in income have grown faster than in most developed countries (Pearson, 2012). Because of this, New Zealand's society is being reshaped, stretching to accommodate a new distance between those who 'have' and those who 'have not' (Rashbrooke, 2013). Because this gap has been accentuated in recent years there is a need to examine the notion of the education debt.

## **The Education Debt**

The domination of the British, the planned assimilation of Māori to the British worldview and British education has resulted in what has been articulated as an Education Debt owed to Māori (Bishop, 2005, 2010). Therefore, the question is *not*, are Māori owed an education debt, but rather to what extent New Zealand owes an education debt to its Māori people. This section commences with discussing what an education debt is, and then covers the relevant historical

context to better understand the reasons for the debt and current education disparities. It explores the nature of the education debt and how it might be repaid to the Māori people.

### **What is an Education Debt?**

For the past decade the *achievement gap* has been one of the most talked about terms in education. Ladson-Billings (2006), the pioneer of the term *education debt*, argues that the *achievement gap* is misplaced and instead we need to be focusing on the *education debt*. In her explanation of the education debt, Ladson-Billings (2006) uses the notion of national debt as a metaphor stating that, an education debt is the accumulation of achievement disparities that have accrued annually, and that add up over time. Therefore, it can be explained and argued that the accumulation of achievement gaps over time, for indigenous people, can in turn produce an education debt or deficit. She brings to the forefront the need to engage with the wider notion of an education debt, as it is not just a matter of gaining more funding to solve the educational disparities, but rather, a matter of unearthing the causes of the debt (Bishop, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Bishop (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2006) argue that the historical, economic, socio-political, and moral decisions and policies that characterise our society have created the education debt. Ladson-Billings (2006) states that to be able to better understand the achievement disparities, behavioural problems, and the achievement gap of indigenous peoples within an education context, we need to first assess the extent of the education debt. Bishop (2005, 2010) and Ladson-Billings (2006) argue that to address the inequalities within schools, the dropouts, the poor behaviour, poor achievement and the disengaged students we need *not* focus on the achievement gaps but rather the education debt (Bishop, 2005, 2010; Ladson-Billings).

Once we have assessed the state of the debt, only then can we work towards strategies of repaying the debt to achieve equality in education. Ladson-Billings

(2006) further states that the focus on the achievement gap lends itself to the creation of short-term solutions and initiatives being implemented that are unlikely to address the long-standing underlying problems. As valuable as initiatives such as Te Kotahitanga and He Kākano have been in addressing the achievement gap in secondary school settings, and pioneering an education reform, the focus now needs to be on the debt. How it will be repaid, and working towards strategies of repayment. This will allow for the long-standing, underlying problems within the New Zealand education system to be addressed and resolved to better the educational learning environments for all Māori students (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

### **What is the nature of the education debt?**

Sleeter (2005) agrees, like the United States, New Zealand has spent over a century building an educational system, infrastructure, and set of beliefs around the education of students of British and European decent. In 1862, the Government expectations of Māori as academic learners was low, it was reported to the House of Representatives that a refined education or a high mental culture would be inappropriate for Māori, suggesting that they would be better at getting their living through manual labour over mental labour (Controller and Auditor-General New Zealand, 2012).

Following this, the Native Schools Act was passed in 1867. The act was established as a national system where Māori were subjected to English medium, manual instruction, in Native Schools separate to their non-Māori counterparts, who were educated through academic streams in state schools (Bishop, 2005; Walker, 1975). British settlers viewed Māori people as not being capable of abstract thinking (Bishop, 2005). However, Te Aute College under the leadership of John Thornton provided academic secondary education for its Māori students. Te Aute College produced the first group of Māori university graduates demonstrating that Māori were indeed capable of higher-level tertiary education (Bishop, 2005; Orange, 2013).

Native Schools continued until 1969, when the government either closed them or integrated them into the public system. Māori were then expected to attend the urban state schools. By this time, British students had nearly a century of academic schooling behind them – those with cultural capital succeeded in state schools (Bishop, 2005). As a result of schools being organised monoculturally, Māori students often found that their cultural knowledge was unaccepted or belittled. This amounted to a systematic assault on their identity and wellbeing as Māori people (Bishop, 2005). This, in turn, reinforced teachers and societal perceptions about Māori. There was a fundamental belief in the inherent inferiority of Māori students and low academic expectations (Bishop, 2010; Calman, 2015; Pearson, 2012; Snyder & Nieuwenhuysen, 2010). Textbooks in state schools were referred to by Bishop (2005), as the public face of assimilative policies, and the consequent pathologizing of Māori peoples history and culture continued into the twentieth century.

Deficit theorising of Māori within education was strong, blaming the student, their family and their socioeconomic status for their failures' in education. However, what was not considered in these deficit theories was the fact that Māori were restricted from academic education taught in the medium of English, and banned from using their mother tongue (Bishop, 2005, 2010). Māori had less access to resources and were not involved in the policies and planning of education in New Zealand (Bishop, 2005). There were no grounds for this deficit theorising other than Māori were trying to live and operate within the British world-view, where they were overtly disadvantaged.

The history of educational inequalities in New Zealand has been well documented (Bishop, 2005, 2008; Controller and Auditor-General New Zealand, 2012; Orange, 2013; Walker, 1975). Further to the obvious educational inequalities, The Assimilation Policy was in place in 1915 (Controller and Auditor-General New Zealand, 2012). The British agenda, and the policies that were implemented, stripped Māori of their cultural identity. To survive in the *British world*, Māori had to operate as English speaking, British behaving people. This

resulted in Māori being disadvantaged socially, educationally, economically and politically. Māori became second-class citizens of their own whenua (land).

In 1988, an educational restructuring of school governance in New Zealand saw the launch of the Tomorrow School's Policy. This policy came admittedly after irreversible damage had been done to Māori and their culture. This policy allowed schools to be self-governing and for parents to have *choice* of the educational provider for their children (Bishop, 2005). Several years later followed professional development programmes such as Te Kotahitanga, He Kākano and Kia Eke Panuku, which provided teaching staff with professional development around working with Māori students.

However, reform needed to happen from a policy level. Just as the accumulation of annual fiscal deficits produces an economic debt, so the accumulation of achievement gaps over time has produced an education debt. A debt the education system owes to Māori, who have been short-changed by the system for generations (Bishop, 2005, 2010). The long-term intergenerational legacy of an education system organised in the interests of the dominant group has created this education debt, and moving policy to 'realising potential' will severely exacerbate this pattern (Bishop, 2010, p. 131). Therefore, examination of the debt and how the debt might be repaid or resolved need to be explored.

### **How might the debt be repaid or resolved?**

To bring about social justice in education for Māori people, Bishop (2010) suggests it is possible to institute measures to repay the significant *educational debt* that is owed to Māori people. Bishop (2010) suggests working towards an education reform (on the national level) that seeks to raise the achievement and reduce disparities through the implementation of an *education reform that* is successful, sustainable and scalable.

To achieve this goal, *education reform* should seek to raise achievement and reduce disparities, it needs to be part of a broad, system-wide attempt to address systemic minoritisation. Bishop (2010) suggests that there are seven interdependent elements that are all essential for successful, sustainable and scalable education reform. These are developed and based on a model created by Coburn (2003) and then extended by Bishop and O'Sullivan (2005). The reform model is labelled in an acronym GPILSEO which encompasses; goals, pedagogy, institutions, leadership, spread, evidence and ownership. The GPILSEO models' central understanding is that all seven areas must be present from the outset, at a variety of levels: in the classrooms, schools and within the wider system (Bishop, 2010).

An alternative debt repayment option is offered by Sleeter (2005) who suggests, the only way to reconfigure the schooling process so that it works for *both* Māori and Pākehā students is to reconfigure schooling around *Māori ways of knowing* (Sleeter, 2005). What will emerge from a sustained focus on reconstructing classroom processes for Māori student achievement, will be schooling that works better for both Māori and Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) students. Making suggestions that this debt can only be addressed effectively from a political level, arguing that if this debt is repaid then potentially education could improve for these students (Bishop, 2005; Sleeter, 2005).

The outcomes from this thesis study will not directly address the education reform, reconfiguration of schooling, or policy changes that are required to achieve equitable education for all. However, this study will contribute further evidence to the ongoing dialogue (Bishop, 2010) by documenting the voices of Māori alternative education students (Sleeter, 2005). Alternative education student voice will better strengthen the understanding of the varying groups of Māori learners within the education system. Such voice can help towards reshaping educational environments for Māori learners and reconfiguring classrooms around *Māori ways of knowing* (Bishop, 2010; Sleeter, 2005). While acknowledging that the education debt needs to be recovered at a national level, this study can form a part of the collective dialogue.



## **Te Kotahitanga**

This section will discuss an education reform that began in 1998, with the aim of enhancing the learning experiences and educational outcomes of junior secondary school students in Aotearoa New Zealand, while simultaneously challenging the status quo of New Zealand's education system. This educational reform, given the name Te Kotahitanga, set out to implement strategies within schools that might improve the educational experience and achievement gap of Māori (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop et al., 2014). Te Kotahitanga is important to this study, as it was transformational in identifying disparities and educational needs of Māori. The action research of the Te Kotahitanga project provided teacher development, solutions to support classroom practices, and address the underachievement of Māori students (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; 2009).

### **What is Te Kotahitanga?**

When Te Kotahitanga was first conceived, the major challenges facing education in New Zealand were the continuing social, economic, and political disparities, primarily between the descendants of the European colonisers and the indigenous Māori people (Bishop, 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2009). The identified disparities were, and still are, reflected in educational outcomes where Māori have reportedly low rates of achievement compared to non-Māori (Bishop et al., 2009; Ministry of Education, 2010). Furthermore, the Māori suspension rate in 2015 was two and a half times higher than the Pākehā suspension rate (Ministry of Education, 2017). Te Kotahitanga was a collaborative response to the long-standing underachievement among Māori students in mainstream schools.

Te Kotahitanga was a New Zealand Ministry of Education-funded, professional development and research project, undertaken using action research and a Kaupapa Māori methodology (Bishop, 2012). The project ran over *five phases* with phases one and two as pilots, and phases three, four and five full implementation. The project began by listening to the views of Māori students,

whānau, teachers, and principals. In conjunction with literature, an Effective Teaching Profile was then developed for teachers of Māori students and was used as a framework for teachers' professional development. The Effective Teaching Profile was then implemented in mainstream secondary schools across New Zealand (Bishop, 2008, 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2009).

The project drew on Kaupapa Māori principles (Mead, 1997). These principles or *intervention elements* were: self-determination, cultural aspirations, reciprocal learning, mediation of home and school relationships, school relationships as extended family, and a collective vision (Bishop, 2012; Bishop et al., 2014). Bishop (2008) explains how these elements were extrapolated by the Te Kotahitanga project to be able to provide a Kaupapa Māori pedagogic framework forming an education project where: power was shared between self-determining individuals within non-dominating relations of interdependence; where culture counts; learning is interactive and dialogic; extended family-type relationships are fundamental to the pedagogy; and participants are connected and committed to one another through the establishment of a common vision, for what constitutes educational excellence (Bishop, 2008, 2012; Bishop & Berryman 2009).

Te Kotahitanga drew on Māori understanding and sense-making processes, and sought to address Māori people's aspirations for self-determination within the wider context of a post-colonial reality (Bishop, 2008). The project was designed to support teachers to improve Māori students learning and achievement, and enabled teachers to create a culturally responsive context for learning. A context that was responsive to evidence of student performance and understanding (Bishop, 2012; Bishop et al., 2014; Ministry of Education, 2016b). The other focus was to enable school leaders, and the wider school community to focus on changing school structures and organisations to more effectively support teachers in this endeavour (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2016b).

The overall aim of the project was to investigate how to improve the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream secondary school classrooms. This vision created an image of classroom relations and interactions where Māori students were able to participate on their own terms. It was proposed that the students would determine these terms because the pedagogic process held relational self-determination as a central value (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2012). The next section will discuss the Teaching Professional Development that was developed and implemented through the research findings of the Te Kotahitanga project.

### **Te Kotahitanga: Teaching Professional Development**

The Te Kotahitanga research team developed an Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) based on suggestions made by Māori students, their parents, their teachers, and principals as well as using international literature (Bishop, 2012; Bishop et al., 2014; Ministry of Education, 2016b). Te Kotahitanga concluded from student narratives that: increased caring; raised expectations; improved classroom management; moving from traditional to discursive classroom interactions; focus less on student behaviour and more on student learning and how they learn - as influencing Māori students educational achievement (Bishop et al., 2003).

The ETP formed the basis of the Te Kotahitanga professional development programme, which was run in 49 schools (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter & Clapham, 2012). The Te Kotahitanga programme commenced by providing teachers with professional learning opportunities, in which they could evaluate where they discursively positioned themselves, taking into account their own worldview and culture. This process required teachers to be reflexive in how *their* mindset could affect their own images, principles, and practices in relation to Māori students in their classroom (Bishop et al., 2014).

The aim of the programme was to support teachers to implement a *culturally responsive pedagogy of relations* in their classroom by implementing the dimensions of the ETP (Bishop et al., 2014). The overarching aims of the ETP

were to positively reject deficit theorising as a means of explaining Māori students educational achievement levels, and know and understand how to bring about change in Māori students educational achievement, by being professionally committed to doing so (Bishop et al., 2014). Bishop (2012), and Bishop et al. (2014) explain that the ETP promoted discursive (re)positioning by teachers so that they could see themselves as being agents of change, rather than being frustrated in their attempts to address the learning of Māori students through deficit theorising, or blaming the students and their communities.

The ETP detailed six observable ways in which a teacher demonstrated that they were creating a culturally appropriate and responsive context for their learners, these included:

***Manaakitanga:*** caring for their students as culturally located human beings;

***Mana motuhake:*** having high expectations of their students' learning;

***Whakapiringatanga:*** being able to manage their classrooms and their curriculum to promote learning;

***Wānanga:*** being able to engage in a range of discursive learning interactions with students or facilitate students to engage with others in these ways;

***Ako:*** knowing a range of strategies that could facilitate learning interactions; and

***Kotahitanga:*** collaboratively promoting, monitoring and reflecting upon each students learning outcomes; being able to modify their instructional practices in ways that lead to improvements in Māori students achievement; and sharing this knowledge with their students (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2009).

Te Kotahitanga was highly scrutinized, researched and evaluated. Despite this – or, perhaps as a result of this – it continued to be the subject of considerable debate and controversy. Both in terms of its underpinning rationale and its demonstrable efficacy in supporting improved outcomes for Māori students in schools (Berryman & Wearmouth, 2016, p.68). One critique, which I will discuss, came from Gutschlag (2007) who was involved in the Te Kotahitanga programme as a teacher at Alfriston College. She commented on how certain aspects of the project were contradictory and that the theory upon which Te Kotahitanga was based was problematic. She highlighted that teachers were not only agents of change; they were expected to be the sole agents of change.

For the most part she challenged the theory and rationale behind the Te Kotahitanga project. Gutschlag (2007) viewed the narratives of the Māori students as being explicitly privileged by the research, and challenged the importance of the weight given to student voice within the project. In response to Gutschlag's (2007) statements I am inclined to disagree, in support of Te Kotahitanga. Bruner (1999) makes reference to the need to understand where young people are coming from in their learning, culture and behaviour in schools to be able to effect and action change. Therefore, without giving weight to student's voice from the minority group, Te Kotahitanga would not have been able to meet its project aims or address the underachievement of Māori students in mainstream secondary school classrooms (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2012; Cram, 2006).

Although students' voice was priority for the Te Kotahitanga project, particular groups of student voice was overlooked, with the alternative education students being one of those groups. From the outset the Te Kotahitanga project did declare that their research was focused on year 9 and 10 mainstream secondary school students. However, technically, alternative education students are still enrolled in their mainstream school while attending their alternative education centre – the schools still receive funding for their students, have legal responsibility for their students, are meant to oversee their education including

the transition into alternative education, and report to the Ministry of Education monthly on their students in alternative education (Education Review Office, 2011). Therefore, for that reason I am inclined to suggest that Te Kotahitanga did miss some key representative student voice within their research. However, in making that statement, Te Kotahitanga did provided New Zealand with its first transformative educational framework in considering a bicultural school and classroom environment.

While Te Kotahitanga provided the nation with rich data, student and whānau voice, and frameworks to work from – Te Kotahitanga alone was not enough to reform education so that it was equitable for all Māori learners (Bishop, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Sleeter, 2005). Another point to consider is that New Zealand schools are self-governing; Te Kotahitanga was a choice for schools to opt into, not a mandatory requirement from government – any *optional* strategy such as Te Kotahitanga was set to fail (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Further to this, the Ministry of Education invested \$35 million over 12 years on the project, and in 2013, funding ceased (Carson, 2013). If, for argument sake, a nationwide policy was introduced stating that all New Zealand schools must implement and use the Te Kotahitanga Effective Teaching Profile, and teachers registration was dependent on it – would that have had a more long lasting impact on Māori student achievement?

Without the bold move of the research team that worked on the Te Kotahitanga project, the education system would still be unchanged for Māori. It was the *voice* of the *people* that created the greatest benefit to this project and in turn informed the Effective Teaching Profile to help teachers rethink their pedagogical practice. The underpinning aims, and rationale, as well as the process of teacher professional development in Te Kotahitanga reflected Bruner's notion of culturalist models of mind as well as Māori models of learning.

## Culturalist Models of Mind and Māori Models of Learning

Vygotsky (1978) referred to all learning as a *social* and *cultural* process with the major theme of his theoretical framework being, that *social interaction* plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, it can be argued that it is vital that social interaction between the teacher and student, and the student and student, are positive so that individual students' cognition can be developed within the classroom. Cognition is used here to mean the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1986, 1991). The Te Kotahitanga project set out to research the causes of Māori student's underachievement and then suggested, from the collated data, professional development targeted at positively rejecting deficit theorising about Māori students (Bishop & Berryman, 2006).

Bell's (2011) writings emphasise the importance of theorising *teaching* as a sociocultural practice. She states that it is important for educators to make sense of teaching and learning in the classroom, with the main goal being to create an account of human thinking and action. Nuthall (1997) and Wertsch (1991) further state that once we have created an account of human thinking and action we must then recognise the relationship between mind and action, and their social, cultural and institutional settings. The initial phases of Te Kotahitanga focused on creating an account of human thinking and action in relation to both the teacher and their Māori students. Once this had taken place the research team were then able to focus on the relationship between mind and action, and how these impacted the underachievement of Māori students. This dialogue was pivotal in adapting and improving the cultural and institutional settings for Māori students.

Bell (2011) explored sociocultural theorising of teaching, in particular, the eight aspects of sociocultural practice and within each of these she explored the relationships between people and context, and between mind and action, with cultural practice being one of the eight practices. Bell (2011) identified the

importance of a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy used in Te Kotahitanga. Cummins (1995) also proposes that social relations ontologically precede all other concerns in education, with Te Kotahitanga being seen to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations (Bishop, 2008, 2012). The Te Kotahitanga project was a project that used sociocultural theorising to help implement change for Māori students (Bell, 2011).

Constructivism refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves, with each learner individually (and socially) constructing meaning as he or she learns (Hein, 1991). This theory is based on how people learn; educationalists and researchers within education need to consider their work in relation to theories of learning and knowledge (Hein, 1991). Bruner (1999) states that it matters how we believe the mind works, so that we can understand behaviour and action in social cultural institutional settings to better plan for our learners. If we believe in Bruner's discussion of culturalism, then the mind is capable of reflection and discourse, therefore, we should be concerned about the discussions that happen between individuals, how we clarify understanding, and how this can be incorporated into teaching and learning. Bruner (1999) discusses culture as a system of: values, rights, exchanges, obligations, opportunities, power in society, and demands of a cultural system in which individuals find themselves necessarily affecting those individuals. Bruner's (1999) views guiding the culturalist approach encompass nine tenets. Seven of these tenets are discussed below in relation to the Te Kotahitanga professional development programme and implementation.

Te Kotahitanga and the Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) reflected Bruner's notion of culturalist models of mind, these models of mind closely relate to Māori models of learning. The *perspectival tenet* is about meaning making and understanding that individuals make different meaning from the same facts (Bruner, 1999). Teachers can engage in effective teaching interactions with Māori students as Māori. This tenet acknowledges that understanding something in one way does not preclude understanding it in other ways (Bruner, 1999). Different cultures may view things differently as they are viewing the



information through different lenses. By teachers accepting this and working with students to accept their worldview in creating new knowledge, they are creating a rich and dynamic sharing of knowledge, which, relates to the ETP of Wānanga and Ako (Bell, 2011; Bishop et al., 2014; Bruner, 1999).

In the *constraints tenet* Bruner (1999) discusses the importance of linguistic awareness, being aware of the differences in language and looking at different ways things are said for example, in the use of metaphors and stories. This cultural awareness relates to Wānanga, Mana motuhake and Ako (Bishop et al., 2014) where teachers can draw on student's knowledge and experiences. For example, in the teaching and learning of the events around the Treaty of Waitangi, considering the different stories and other cultural views other than the dominant culture. Bruner (1999) summarises this tenet by stating that it is 'thinking about thinking' (p. 161). It is about not letting constraints such as culture, background or language effect a student's chances of success and adjusting teaching to suit the levels and cultures of your students.

The *constructivism tenet* suggests that education must be concerned as aiding young humans in learning to use the tools of meaning making and reality construction (Bruner, 1999). This is so that students can better adapt to the world in which they find themselves and for teachers to help students in that process. Bruner (1999) suggests that reality is made not found. Therefore, teachers who care about their student's performance, Mana motuhake (Bishop et al., 2014), are working within the tenet of constructivism.

Bruner (1999) explains the *interactional tenet* as focusing on passing on knowledge and skill using a sub community of interaction, basically learners help each other learn; in a school setting students learn best through interaction with others. This tenet closely relates to the ETP element of Ako (Bishop et al., 2014), where teaching and learning practice involves teachers and students learning in an interactive dialogic relationship (Bishop et al., 2014). The *externalization tenet*, is the way that collective activity is organised by teachers in classrooms and the outcomes (works) that are produced are really important and can have

long lasting effects. Collaborative cultural activity can produce *works* that will then take on an existence of their own. This tenet relates to Te Kotahitanga where the teacher and student work together collaboratively to work on improving the educational achievement of Māori students (Bishop et al., 2014).

Bruner (1999) discusses the *institutional tenet* as education becoming institutionalised and hierarchal, and suggests that one way to bring about change is to 'equip teachers with the necessary background training to take an effective part in reform' (p 187). The ETP is a professional development tool, which allows teachers to create a culturally appropriate and responsive context for learning (Bishop et al., 2014; Bruner, 1999). Further to this, the Te Kotahitanga professional development programme consisted of an initial induction hui, followed by a term-by-term cycle of formal observations of teachers' classroom practices as they relate to the ETP. Follow-up feedback on these observations, group co-construction meetings, and targeted shadow coaching (Berryman & Wearmouth, 2016), provided teachers with the training and skills to take part in the education reform.

The *tenet of identity and self-esteem* discusses how important education is to the formation of self; what we think about ourselves and our potential for learning and achieving. Manaakitanga is an important aspect of the ETP as it refers to building and nurturing a supportive and caring environment, caring for students as culturally located human beings above all else (Bishop et al., 2014). Finally, the *Narrative tenet* (storying), which runs through the whole Te Kotahitanga programme from its research through to the ETP, but more specifically, the relationship to *Mana motuhake*, is needed to help children create a version of the world in which they can envisage a place for themselves. Schools often treat narrative as an optional extra rather than intrinsic to the education of children. Children should have a feel for the histories and stories of their own culture that will then nourish their sense of themselves (Bruner, 1999).

Constructivism, Culturalist Models of Mind and Māori Models of Learning are integral to explore within this study as they form a base for which we begin to

understand Māori learners – Māori Models of Mind. Te Kotahitanga used Tenets (Bruner, 1999) and Sociocultural Participatory Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) as underpinning theoretical frames to form their knowledge of Māori learners. The importance of learners being able to bring themselves culturally into the classroom is vital to their success, viewing education as a *social* and *cultural* practice. Highlighting culture as a system of values, rights, exchanges, obligatory opportunities and power within society (Bruner, 1999; Glynn, 2009).

## **Connectedness**

What is connectedness for Māori and what does it look like? Māori believe that there is a deep kinship between humans and the natural world, and that all life is connected – Māori see humans as part of the fabric of life (Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004; Te Ara, 2016). Māori consider themselves as the people of the land with particular groups having authority over certain places, due to their ancestors' relationships (Kidman, 2012; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004; Te Ara, 2016). Māori believe that human life is about aligning oneself to the natural world, and that the natural world is able to *speak* to humans, giving them knowledge and understanding (Te Ara, 2016). Māori connect with oneself and each other through whenua (land) and whakapapa (genealogy); Māori are able to whakapapa right back through the generations to Papatūānuku (the earth mother), which in turn, connects Māori to the whenua of New Zealand (Te Ara, 2016).

When Māori people first meet each other they commonly go through their whakapapa, identifying themselves to generations of people, and the whenua of their ancestors, to find common links and *connections* (Kidman, 2012; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004; Te Ara, 2016). This establishes a common ground, understandings, relationships, and respect between individuals. Therefore, it is integral for Māori to establish connections with others in forming and building relationships (Kidman, 2012; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004; Te Ara,

2016). Whanaungatanga helps to create connectedness for Māori. Whanaungatanga is defined as a relationship, kinship and sense of family connection (Reilly, 2003; Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, 2016). It's about strengthening relationships through shared experiences and working together to provide people with a sense of belonging (Reilly, 2003; Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, 2016). Māori place a great deal of importance on relationships, in being able to work in partnership with one another. Positive connected relationships between students, school-wide, and with community, help to improve the learning environment for Māori students (Bishop, 2005; Kidman, 2012; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004; Reilly, 2003).

Students *feel* like valued members of the environment, when they have a connection and connectedness with *their* environment (Bishop, 2005; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004). This also implies being able to bring Māori culture, values and worldview into the classroom. Centuries of a Eurocentric education system, Pākehā domination, deficit thinking, and a monoculture society has led to Māori feeling *disconnected* to society, and in turn education (Bishop, 2005, 2010). The importance of learners being able to bring themselves culturally into the classroom is vital to their success. Therefore, when we view education as a *social* and *cultural* practice, highlighting culture as a system of values, rights, exchanges, obligatory opportunities and power within society (Bruner, 1999); teachers who take into account the culture of their students are practicing culturally responsive pedagogy.

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been shown to raise the achievement of students whose culture is not the dominant Eurocentric culture in mainstream schooling (Bell, 2011; Sleeter, 2010). Culture is seen as multifaceted and cannot be linked just to ethnicity, but also, for example, to other cultures (Bell, 2011). Culture is socially constructed and therefore influenced by social, economic, and political discourses; culture is constructed by humans, hence the dominant discourses at any time can determine what will be valued or not (Bell, 2011).

“Teaching can be viewed as a cultural practice as our teaching is embedded in and determined by culture” (Bell, 2011, p. 39). Whether teachers acknowledge the important role that culture plays within teaching practices or not; literature heavily supports the notion that culture is an important aspect, to not only consider within teaching practices, but to also be active in and culturally responsive too (Bell, 2011; Bishop et al., 2009). As teachers we need to be not only acknowledging our own culture and how that informs our teaching, we need to also acknowledge and validate our students and their culture to ensure an optimal environment to support cognitive growth and connectedness (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman 2006; Bruner, 1999; Vygotsky 1978).

Bell (2011) suggests that teachers need to acknowledge their own culture first and foremost, as their cultural norms inform: their choice of teaching and learning activities; the relationships that they form with their students; what knowledge is valued; the expectations that they have for their students; and the learning outcomes valued. The He Kākano leadership professional development programme had a similar philosophy, with the He Kākano team running professional development for senior leaders across New Zealand, a top down model (Ministry of Education, 2016b). Senior management endorsement and engagement in culturally responsive practice was identified to be important in bringing about change for Māori learners within mainstream secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2016b). Over the course of three years, senior leaders attended five wānanga. At the first wānanga leaders were asked to acknowledge their cultural position, their ways of doing things, thinking and acting, and what informed their cultural norms (Ministry of Education, 2016b; Wearmouth & Berryman, 2009).

The leaders were then asked to use their cultural lens to give reasons as to why Māori students were failing in the New Zealand education system. The majority of the leaders used deficit thinking to explain why their Māori students were under performing (Ministry of Education, 2016b; Wearmouth & Berryman, 2009). However, after engaging in Māori culture, customs and tikanga with a Māori worldview and lens, within the same wānanga, their deficit thinking

changed to - what can the school system do for their Māori students in general? Bell (2011) suggests that after a teacher understands their own cultural position, that the teacher then needs to understand the culture of the students in their classroom to create that *connectedness*. Bell (2011) refers to eight features of culturally responsive pedagogy, which go towards creating that connectedness with Māori students (Bell, 2011).

- “Culturally responsive teaching is not ethnic-blind and takes into account, rather than ignores, the culture and ethnicity of the students”.
- “Culturally responsive teaching does not use deficit theorising to explain differences in the achievement of students of different ethnicities”.
- “Culturally responsive teaching includes high expectations of students, not expectations based on stereotypes”.
- “Culturally responsive teaching involves forming relationships with students for professional caring, and a commitment that students will achieve academically”.
- “Culturally responsive teaching includes teachers knowing and relating to their students as culturally located human beings”.
- “Culturally responsive teaching includes building relationships and communications with families and communities of students”.
- “Culturally responsive teaching involves using the cultural and ethical knowledge, language, values and practices of the students as resources to inform teacher decision making about curriculum and pedagogy”.
- “Culturally responsive teaching is emancipatory and transformative, and hence it is political for social justice”.

(Bell, 2011, p. 42)

## Alternative Education

As discussed earlier alternative education in New Zealand is described by the Ministry of Education (2016a) as being designed as an option in a range of responses to ensure that all students engage and succeed in education. Students who attend alternative education are described as having negative experiences in school which have led to the student becoming a habitual truant, while other students are deemed as behavioural challenging and are consequently excluded from school (Ministry of Education, 2016a). In addressing the theme of alternative education within this literature review, it needs to be noted from the outset, that research into alternative education within New Zealand is limited to the literature that I have included in this review.

Alternative education began in New Zealand in 2000. In 2003, the Alternative Education National Body New Zealand (AENB) was established. The AENB is a collective voice for alternative education providers from across New Zealand. The AENB describes alternative education as providing learning opportunities for students aged 13 to 16 years old who are *alienated* from mainstream schooling (Alternative Education National Body New Zealand, 2016). Recognising that alternative education is a specialised service meeting the educational needs for some of New Zealand's most *at risk* and transient young people (Alternative Education National Body New Zealand, 2016). They state that by using a holistic approach and creating a whānau environment, educational success can be achieved for these students (Alternative Education National Body New Zealand, 2016).

The Ministry of Education funds alternative education, the funding is provided directly to the secondary schools of where the student is enrolled. Approximately 20 million dollars is allocated per year (Education Review Office, 2010). The Education Act 1989, states that all young people must attend a registered school until their sixteenth birthday (Ministry of Education, 2016a) therefore, it is left up to the secondary schools to choose how they use that funding. Some schools choose to use outside providers to deliver educational

programmes that meet the needs of their alternative education students (Ministry of Education, 2016a). These schools enrol their students, and maintain oversight, but pass on the appropriate part of the funding to the community provider, who then provides the alternative education programme (Ministry of Education, 2016a).

Often community providers are able to meet the needs of these young people as they are often part of the young person's ethnic or cultural community, or because the provider is able to use a non-school approach (Ministry of Education, 2016a). Student places were initially allocated to schools by using a formula, however, since the initial allocation in 2000, places have been moved to meet areas where there is the strongest demand (Ministry of Education, 2016a). The Education Review Report (2010) stated that there were around 3500 alternative education places.

In 2008, the New Zealand Council for Education Research carried out research for the Ministry of Education into the educational histories and pathways of alternative education students in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2009a). This research resulted in a report being published in 2009. The focus of this research study was to document the voices of alternative education students. The reasoning behind this was because there had been no research, in New Zealand, that recorded these students' perspectives on their educational experiences (Ministry of Education, 2009a). The qualitative method of one-to-one, open-ended interviews was used at five alternative education centres, a total of 41 interviews were conducted; 51% of students interviewed identified as Māori (Ministry of Education, 2009a). The research captured the following themes:

- How students experienced learning in their schooling so far;
- The nature of their educational and social experiences in alternative education centres;
- The impact of their health, friends, and family life experiences on their learning; and



- What students considered to be their strengths and aspirations for their future.

(Ministry of Education, 2009a)

Key findings from the interviews found that *100% of all students interviewed* at the alternative education centres said that they enjoyed being at the alternative education centre; with 95% saying that they enjoyed learning again, since attending the alternative education centre (Ministry of Education, 2009a). It was interesting to note that 75% had become disengaged with learning at Secondary School, with many of the students stating that they had become seriously disengaged at secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2009a). Further to this, 25% had become disengaged at intermediate school, with all interview participants reflecting on their enjoyment of primary school (Ministry of Education, 2009a).

The main reported reason for disengagement at secondary school appeared to be that the teachers did not know or develop effective relationships with these students (Ministry of Education, 2009a). Further to this, the students identified a mismatch between their levels of achievement and teaching levels; teachers were pitching the learning too high for student's abilities (Ministry of Education, 2009a). It is interesting to note that the Te Kotahitanga project had been running for ten years at the commencement of this research.

Students identified the one-to-one help that alternative education centres provided in helping them to re-establish their confidence in their ability to learn (Ministry of Education, 2009a). Most of the students had experienced problems in their family lives, including but not limited to: violence, drugs and alcohol, gang connections, Child, Youth and Family interventions, poverty, and sexual abuse (Ministry of Education, 2009a). However, most students demonstrated great resilience and strength in negotiating their personal circumstances, with tutors in alternative education working with students first as people and secondly as learners (Ministry of Education, 2009a). This report concluded that alternative education appeared to be successful in restoring these young

people's sense of self and belonging and was mostly effective for reengaging these students (Ministry of Education, 2009a).

In 2010, the Ministry of Education arranged for the Education Review Office to evaluate the work of six alternative education providers (Education Review Office, 2010). Two Review Officers spent up to two days onsite with each of the six providers and during that time the Review Officers observed classes, examined documentation and interviewed staff, students and in some cases, staff from the managing schools (Education Review Office, 2010). Unfortunately, this evaluation did not have a specific focus on Māori learners and was highlighted by the reviewers themselves, as a small sample that could only be indicative (Education Review office, 2010). The limitations were noted that the evaluation did not comment on the overall quality of alternative education nationally, however, it did identify some factors of good practice common between the six centres (Education Review Office, 2010). Findings for their report were set under three headings: pedagogy, curriculum and assessment; a focus on the student; and leadership, coordination and quality systems (Education Review Office, 2010).

The conclusion of this report outlined the critical success factors underpinning the good practice of these providers:

- The quality of the relationships between staff and students
- The use of a curriculum that matched the individual needs of students
- The passionate and compassionate approach of alternative education staff
- The ability of staff to have students aspire for a more positive future for themselves
- An ability to address the wide range of social and educational needs of students
- The leadership and teamwork of alternative education providers
- The relationships with schools
- The relationships with whānau/families.

(Education Review Office, 2010)

In 2011, the Education Review Office, while conducting scheduled ERO reviews of 44 schools, collected data on alternative education schools and providers. Data that was collected was used to assess how well the secondary schools were engaging all year 9-11 students, including their *at risk* students. This review focused in parts on the partnership of the schools with their alternative education providers. The report highlighted some key findings:

- In 2010, 63% of alternative education students were Māori with only 25% being Pākehā/ European.
- In 2010, two thirds of alternative education students were male

(Education Review Office, 2011)

Further findings and information collected highlighted that out of 44 schools who were under review, over three quarters of the secondary schools placed at least one student in alternative education. Out of that, two thirds that placed students in alternative education, were not sufficiently involved in the process (Education Review Office, 2011). It was highlighted that placing a student in alternative education does not end a schools responsibility to care for that student's welfare (Education Review Office, 2011). Further to this, most enrolling schools had limited involvement with the alternative education centre once the student was off-site, and too many schools did not actively work with or support the alternative education providers (Education Review Office, 2011).

Bishop (2010) refers to Robert Harverman, a respected economist, who suggests that the education debt is: the forgone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing in (primarily) low income children, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems (e.g. crime, low productivity, low wages, low labour force participation) that require on-going public investment (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Arguably, schools needing to send students, a high number of Māori students, into alternative education centres only proves that we still have an education system that is not equitable for Māori.

Although some of the noted research gives voice to alternative education students, it does not give voice to Māori students, despite identifying in 2010 that 63% (approx. 2205 Māori students) of alternative education enrolments were Māori (Education Review Office, 2011). Therefore, this study intends to give a voice to Māori students attending alternative education, to explore the concept of connectedness and its relationship to self-efficacy within the learning environment; to improve Māori student's educational experiences in secondary school by highlighting what works in alternative education for Māori, and to add to the ongoing dialogue and research within this field.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided a historical context of the colonisation of New Zealand and the effects on Māori, discussing such themes and terms as assimilation and the founding document of New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi. An educational debt was discussed in terms of Māori being owed an education debt due to the evidenced mistreatment and biased set up of the New Zealand education system, in particular the Native Schools act. It was discussed that Māori did not have the cultural collateral to succeed; deficit theorising was discussed as commonly teachers would deficit theorise about their Māori students rather than understand their learning styles, their lived realities or the historical reasoning's behind their underachievement. Te Kotahitanga as a transformational research project was discussed in detail, highlighting the educational needs of Māori students and providing teachers with an Effective Teaching Profile.

Culturalist models of mind and Māori models of learning were discussed in terms of the theorists that underpinned the Te Kotahitanga research (Bruner, 1999; Hein, 1991; Nuthall, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1986, 1991). More recent national research of culturally responsive teaching (Bell, 2011) was discussed and linked to the works of Te Kotahitanga; definitions of connectedness were explained from a Māori worldview. To conclude this chapter I discussed the

background of alternative education in New Zealand, how it works, how it is funded and its position within our education system. Chapter 3 explains the research methodologies and methods, and presents the research questions to be investigated, in addition to describing how the theoretical framework was developed.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Whakataukī

*Titiro whakamuri hei ārahi i ngā uaratanga kei te kimihia.*

*Look to the past for guidance and seek out what is needed.*

### Overview

This chapter describes the research methodology and the methods applied in this study. It commences with an introduction outlining the research question, aim, purpose and intended outcome. The theoretical framework is discussed in detail giving context to the chosen methodology and methods. Methodology, participants and procedures, and data collection methods follow giving detail to the mechanics of this research. To finish the ethical considerations, validity, authenticity and reliability are discussed.

### Introduction

This thesis examines the perspectives of Māori adolescents and their experience of secondary schooling, and alternative-education, learning environments. The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the reasons behind the high numbers of Māori student referrals to alternative education, where the loss of connection was in their schooling experience, and how they reconnected to learning. The desired outcome of this study would be to have student voice help affect change for future Māori learners. This study will add to previous knowledge and research conducted by Te Kotahitanga and He Kākano research teams, by adding student voice from an alternative education centre. The findings from this study will add knowledge to the alternative education space, and may contribute to the ongoing dialogue around policy changes (Cohen et al, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Mutch, 2005).

In 2015, I was employed as the manager of the alternative education centre where the interviews were conducted. I had close professional relationships with most of the participants involved. However, I was not employed by the centre while undertaking this study. Because of my relationship with the participants I considered myself to be an insider researcher; the research setting was one in which I was very familiar with and strongly advocated for. Some may argue that my position as an insider may have posed an issue of validity in regards to my personal interests and involvement in this educational environment (Cohen et al., 2011).

The benefits of being an insider researcher far outweighed the negatives. I saw value in the connection that I already had with the participants, and hoped that my connection would allow for all of the participants to be open and honest with me throughout the data collection process (Cram, 2009; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004; Te Ara, 2016). The research question: In what ways do the perceptions of connectedness of Māori students in Alternative Education secondary schools affect their self-efficacy within the learning environment, has been designed to represent the voice of alternative education student experiences in different learning environments, and how these experiences have affected their overall educational experience.

## **Theoretical Framework**

As previously identified in the literature review, there is a gap in the research when it comes to the representation of the voices of Māori students within alternative education settings. In fact, there is a gap in the representation of the general population of student voice within alternative education. Only one evaluation, in the sixteen years that alternative education has been running in New Zealand, has represented a small sample of student voice (Education Review office, 2010). The student voice that was represented was not classified by ethnicity. Therefore, there was no way of specifically determining the experiences of Māori alternative education students.

The Te Kotahitanga research project pioneered data collection of Māori student voice in 1999 (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2003). This study used Kaupapa Māori based research, which was effective in gathering Māori student voice (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2003). The result of this project was the development and implementation of the Effective Teaching Profile (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). The Effective Teaching Profile guided teachers across New Zealand in being culturally reflective and reflexive in their own practice (Bell, 2011; Bishop 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2009).

The Te Kotahitanga research project paved the way for other researchers, in terms of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Bell, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2008, 2009b, 2013; Wearmouth & Berryman, 2009). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy refers to a student-centred approach to teaching, where the students' cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement, and a sense of well-being about the students cultural place in the world (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2006, 2009; Bishop & Glynn, 2003; Bishop et al., 2014). Bell (2011) extended on the works of Te Kotahitanga in discussing the cultural practice of teaching as one of her eight teaching practices. Bell (2011) heavily references the work of Te Kotahitanga whilst building new knowledge within this area.

There have been three main school-based implementation programmes that have focused on improving educational success for Māori students, improving teacher practices, and challenging deficit thinking. I have identified these as: The Effective Teaching Profile, Te Kotahitanga; Leadership Professional Development, He Kākano; and Kia eke Panuku, Building on Success (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2009b, 2013, 2016b). However, all three of these school-based programmes did not include the alternative education student's voice within their research and implementation programmes. One element that all of these research projects did have in common was that they used Kaupapa Māori research practices, customs, tikanga and methodology as their fundamental research base.



Initially, I was conflicted in selecting the paradigm to work within, until I came across the work of Graham Smith (2004). He highlighted the important role that Critical Theory plays within Kaupapa Māori research. Smith, Hoskins and Jones (2012) state 'Kaupapa Māori has its roots in two intellectual influences - the validity and legitimacy of Māori language, knowledge and culture, as well as critical social theory' (p. 12). Smith et al. (2012) go on to state that a lot of Māori researchers dismiss Critical Theory as they feel it is a 'Pākehā theory', however, it is the joining of transformative practice and structural analysis, is an essential part to Kaupapa Māori research (Smith et al., 2012). Therefore, a Critical Theory Paradigm with a Kaupapa Māori methodology is the most fitting approach for this research.

A Critical Theory approach is a social theory and process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions, to uncover the real structures in the material world, in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005; Neuman, 2011). As opposed to traditional theory, which is orientated only to understand and explain it, Critical Theory aims to go beneath the surface of social life and uncover the assumptions that prevent us from a full and true understanding of how the world works (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005; Neuman, 2011). The Critical Theory approach in relation to Kaupapa Māori research is research, by Māori, for Māori and with Māori; regaining control over Māori knowledge and Māori resources (Cram, 2009; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Smith, 1999).

It is important to note that such research is not done in a vacuum; non-Māori researchers have committed many transgressions against Māori, which has led to suspicion and a lack of trust of research within Māori communities (Bishop, 2005; Cram, 2009; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Smith, 1999). Over the years non-Māori researchers have disempowered Māori through either misrepresenting Māori voice or claiming Māori knowledge as their own (Bishop, 2005; Cram, 2009). Kaupapa Māori research is literally *a Māori way* of doing research (Katoa Ltd, 2016). As an analytical approach, Kaupapa Māori is about thinking critically, developing a critique of Pākehā (non-Māori) constructions and definitions of

Māori, and affirming the importance of Māori self-definitions and self-valuations (Cram, 2009; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Smith, 1999).

Kaupapa Māori as an *intervention strategy* for the transformation of Māori is based on six intervention elements or principles as described by Cram on her website Katoa Ltd (2016). These principles are embedded throughout this study from conception to cessation:

**Tino Rangatiratanga – the self-determination principle**

Has been discussed in terms of mana motuhake, sovereignty and self-determination. Tino Rangatiratanga is about having meaningful control over one's own life and cultural wellbeing. This principle is embedded in the Treaty of Waitangi. In signing the Treaty in 1840 the sovereign chiefs of Aotearoa New Zealand sought to protect their taken-for-granted, sovereign rights into the future.

**Taonga tuku iho – the cultural aspirations principle**

Kaupapa Māori theory asserts a position that to be Māori is normal and taken for granted. Te Reo Māori (Māori language), Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), tikanga (Māori custom) and ahuatanga Māori (Māori characteristics) are actively legitimated and validated. This principle acknowledges the strong emotional and spiritual factor in Kaupapa Māori.

**Ako – the culturally preferred pedagogy principle**

Promotes teaching and learning practices that are unique to tikanga Māori (custom). There is also acknowledgement of 'borrowed' pedagogies in that Māori are able to choose their own preferred pedagogies

**Kia piki ake i nga raruraru o te kāinga – the socio-economic mediation principle**

Addresses the issue of Māori socio-economic disadvantages and the negative pressures this brings on whānau (Māori families) and their children. This principle acknowledges that despite these difficulties, Kaupapa Māori mediation practices and values are able to intervene successfully for the wellbeing of the whānau.

### **Whānau – the extended family structure principle**

The Whānau and the practice of whanaungatanga (family connectedness) is an integral part of Māori identity and culture. The cultural values, customs and practices that organise around the whānau and collective responsibility are a necessary part of Māori survival and achievement.

### **Kaupapa – the collective philosophy principle**

Kaupapa Māori initiatives are held together by a collective vision and commitment. This vision connects Māori aspirations to political, social, economic and cultural wellbeing.

The participation of Māori in the entire research process is essential if the confidence of whānau, hapū and iwi in research is to be recovered (Cram, 2006; Katoa Ltd, 2016). Kaupapa Māori within research practice dictates that Māori tikanga and processes are followed throughout the research, from inception to the dissemination of results, to the ongoing relationship formed between the researcher and the research participants (Katoa Ltd, 2016). The Police Officer participant along with co-workers at my current employment, assisted with ensuring that correct tikanga was followed throughout. I felt that the Police Officer participant is regarded nationally within the Police force for implementing Tikanga; he identifies to the local whenua (land); he has the same whānau links as I; and he made himself readily available to assist in the research process.

Further to the cultural guidance throughout the research process, and the *six intervention strategies*; Cram (2009) and Smith (1999) suggest *seven Māori*

*cultural values* that can further guide Kaupapa Māori research. These have now become known as *Community-Up* Research Practices in acknowledgement that they are good practices for all researchers to follow (Katoa Ltd, 2016). This research project was guided by the seven research practices suggested by Cram (2009) and Smith (1999), and described by Katoa Ltd (2016) as:

**1) Aroha ki te tangata:**

Is about having respect for people, it is about allowing people to define the research context (e.g., where and when to meet). It is also about maintaining this respect when dealing with the research data.

**2) He kanohi kitea**

Is about being a face that is seen and known to those who are participating in research. For example researchers should be engaged with and familiar to communities so that trust and communication is developed.

**3) Titiro, whakarongo...kōrero**

Is about looking, listening and then later speaking. Researchers need to take time to understand people's day-to-day realities, priorities and aspirations. In this way the questions asked by the researcher will be relevant.

**4) Manaaki ki te tangata**

Is about looking after people, by sharing, hosting and being generous with time, expertise, and relationships.

**5) Kia tupato**

Is about being cautious. Researchers need to be politically astute, culturally safe, and reflexive practitioners. Staying safe may mean collaborating with elders and others who can guide the research processes, as well as the researchers themselves within communities.

#### **6) Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata**

Refers to the researcher not trampling on the mana (dignity) of people. People are often the experts on their own lives, including their challenges, needs and aspirations. The researcher needs to look for ways to collaborate on research reports, as well as research agendas.

#### **7) Kia mahaki**

Focuses on being humble. The researcher should find ways of sharing their knowledge while remaining humble. The sharing expertise between researchers and participants leads to shared understanding that will make research more trustworthy.

(Cram, 2009; Katoa Ltd, 2016).

To ensure that this study was valid within a Māori context I adopted the *six intervention elements* as described by Katoa Ltd (2016) and Smith (2004) and the *seven research practices* as described by Cram (2006, 2009) and Smith (1999). These research interventions and research practices guided the development of the entire study including but not limited to: research design and research process; the practices and principles set the tone for the survey, focus group interviews, and semi-structured interviews; the practices around dealing with, representing and respecting the data; along with the reflexivity of the whole research process, ensuring validity, trustworthiness and cultural responsiveness.

### **Methodology**

This study is worked within a Kaupapa Māori methodology, employing qualitative methods. The Kaupapa Māori research approach is not restricted to particular methods. However, research conducted within this paradigm naturally fits with more qualitative methods in representing Māori voice. As there are no suggested methods for this approach, researchers are encouraged to select the most appropriate methods related to the overall intention of the research, and engagement of participants (Katoa Ltd, 2016; Smith, 2004). However, Cohen et al. (2011) explain the benefit of using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The difference between qualitative and quantitative research methods, and the types of methods that fall under each are described as follows. Qualitative research described by Mutch (2005) is a research approach that looks in depth at fewer subjects through rich description of their thoughts, feelings, stories and/or activities (p. 223). Some qualitative methods include but are not limited to: observation, interviews, and focus groups. Mutch (2005) describes quantitative as a research approach that reduces numerical data to quantifiable explanations (p. 223) and is analysed using mathematical and statistical methods. Some quantitative methods include but are not limited to: Polls, questionnaires, and surveys.

A mixed methods approach uses a range of data generation methods from both approaches. As the focus of this study is around examining the experiences of alternative education students, the majority of the initial methods rested within the qualitative approach. However, I saw value in using quantitative methods to be able to triangulate data. Triangulating meaning to use two or more research methods to cross reference data – a powerful technique in validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005). Initially, I had planned to use a mixed methods approach. However, upon consultation with the student participants they suggested a restructure to some of the planned data collection methods, which involved removing the method of survey (Cram, 2009; Katoa Ltd, 2016; Smith, 2004).

Using Kaupapa Māori methodology with a mixed methods approach would have allowed flexibility to be able to plan to use the following methods: the method of *survey* to generate a larger sample of people's views, for use in setting up a relatively representative sample focus group, and in triangulation of the focus group and interview data; the method of *semi-structured focus group* with the students and teacher participants; and the method of *one-to-one semi-structured interviews* with the director and Police Officer (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005; Neuman, 2011). Cram (2009) states that Kaupapa Māori research relies heavily on korero (a talk between people) to assist in gathering valid data. The best way to centre Māori students' voice is through working within the

Critical Theory Paradigm, using a Kaupapa Māori methodology, and by applying the method of focus group and individual interviews to allow for that korero to take place (Cram, 2009; Smith, 1999).

Surveys were prepared for use so as to ensure representation of a range of participants; to improve on the already prepared focus group questions; and to help ensure trustworthiness and validity of the focus group data. I met with the students to discuss the research process and to talk about what would be involved if they were to participate. I exercised *Aroha ki te tangata* - having respect for the students' involvement and inviting them to have their say (Cram, 2009; Katoa Ltd, 2016). The students expressed that they were not interested in completing the survey when we had a question and answer session around this. However, they unanimously decided that they would be more than willing to participate in focus groups and talk about their experiences but did not see value in the survey. Therefore, the survey as a means of data collection for this study was removed.

At this point, the students formed a focus group, signaling to me their interest. The initial plan was to have students express their interest in participating in the focus group interview by way of completing the survey. However, since the survey was removed by request of the student participants this expression of interest was gained verbally. I felt that the collaboration with the students over the research process and data collection methods really empowered the students, as they seemed to feel a sense of ownership over the research process. The reason that I state this is that after agreeing to remove the survey the students were more vocal about the whole process, meeting times and focus group structure – they were active participants (Cram, 2009). The semi-structured questions I had prepared for the focus group allowed me to gain more depth to be able to collect the students' 'stories of experiences'. Being an insider gave me an advantage in being able to create a casual atmosphere where the students could be themselves, and be quite expressive in their responses (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005).

## **Participants and Procedures**

Prior to the participant focus groups and interviews I applied to the University of Waikato, Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee, for ethical approval. Approval was granted. I could then engage the alternative education centre for participants for this study.

I established the research space with the Police Officer and alternative education centre before entering into my thesis. I was already prepared with some of the research participants, as the participants wanted the research to be conducted. To engage student participants, although previously I had positioned this idea with them and they were keen, I felt that I needed to meet with them again to discuss the research and to see who still wanted to take part. Prior to the focus groups and interviews I met with all of the participants to discuss with them the research project and informed consent.

As all of the participants were over the age of 16, I did not need to gain parental consent. An important aspect of gaining informed consent was fully informing all of the participants of the purpose, conduct, time commitments and possible dissemination of this research. Ensuring that all participants knew the key ethical principles of research: that participation was voluntary; that they had the right to withdraw; and that the information that they give was considered confidential (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005).

After consent was gained interviews and focus groups were arranged. In negotiation with the alternative education centre, I arranged to have the hui and research take place at the centre. This was great as it maximized student participation as the research did not compromise their after school time, and was also a familiar, comfortable and safe environment for the students to share their experiences. A selected private room was made available for the student focus group. The teachers, Director and Police Officer arranged a time to meet, which worked in with their schedules. At the beginning of each interview and focus group I explained the purpose of the research, how the data would be used



and gave a brief overview of the questions and the format of the interview/focus groups. At this point I gave the participants another opportunity to withdraw from the research.

The focus group and interviews were recorded on a voice recorder and were uploaded to my password-protected computer for later analysis. Recordings were stored under alias titles to protect the identity of the participants and the study. Participants were presented a copy of the focus groups and interview transcripts to review. At this point participants were reminded that they had the option to withdraw from the research. Names of the participants were substituted with pseudonym to keep participant confidentiality, and where an aspect of participant dialogue was identifiable, subtle changes were made to protect the participants identity. A final copy of the transcript was presented to each participant to read and sign off as a true and correct record.

The research process was designed with the *six intervention elements* (Cram, 2006; Smith, 1999) and the *seven research practices* (Katoa Ltd, 2016) in mind, as detailed in Theoretical Framework section. The research process had general Tikanga and customary routines. At the beginning of the focus groups and interviews with the participants a karakia (prayer) was said to open and bless the proceedings, with a karakia to close. During the focus group with students kai (food) was available. After the focus group a shared kai was had in the alternative education classroom where student participants and I got to 'hang out' and chat. This process along with the tikanga and customary practices addressed the practice of *Manaaki ki te tangata*.

The practice of *Titiro, whakarongo...kōrero* was embedded across the whole research process, this is what helped to make this study rich; as a researcher I spent most of the time as a listener, therefore, ensuring the questions that were asked were relevant to the participants (Cram, 2009). Another embedded practice was *Kia tupato*, where I endeavored to ensure that the research practices were culturally safe, and I as a researcher was reflexive in my practice. Staying safe also meant collaborating with the Police Officer participant and

work colleagues around ensuring cultural responsiveness. The research process involved the following *three* stages:

The **first stage** was whakawhanaungatanga (relationship building), reestablishing relationships in a Māori context through hui and shared food. This stage addressed the principle of *Tino Rangatiratanga, Taonga tuku iho and Whānau*. Participants were introduced to the study, the purpose and the aim, and reminded that in this research project all things Māori were actively legitimated and validated. Participants were reminded of the importance of their control over their cultural wellbeing throughout the process, participants were encouraged and invited to have a voice and involvement on the entire research process – this is how the student participant recommendations came about (Cram, 2009; Katoa Ltd, 2016). This supported the initial introduction and re-connection of myself with the research participants in what Bishop (1996) describes as a ‘whānau of interest’. Further to this, an important element that was considered when interviewing Māori participants was the development and maintenance of the relationships, according to Mane (2009) this is where ‘reciprocity, accountability and mutual respect’ (p.3) are expected.

Through a Kaupapa Māori approach, whakawhanaungatanga was a ‘matter of considerable significance’ (Mane, 2009). It was important that in the initial meeting with the participants that they were given opportunities to discuss previous perceptions and experiences of education, negotiate their level of investment, and set guidelines towards a shared outcome of the focus group interviews, individual interviews, and research process; thus addressing the research practices of *Aroha ki te tangata and He kanohi kitea* (Cram, 2009). Through engaging in this process with the participants, especially the student participants, it gave them a sense of ownership and power over the research and the process.

The **second stage** involved one focus-group with five students, one focus-group with two teachers, and semi-structured one-to-one interviews with the Director, and the Police Officer. Following the focus groups and interviews transcripts

were compiled. The transcriptions and proposed themes were presented to their respective groups where the participants had the opportunity to discuss how the transcriptions of the interviews were interpreted, and the themes that came out from the focus groups/ interviews (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005). The participants were reminded at this point that the interview data collected could be retracted at their request. This was important in working towards the research practice of *Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata* in that the researcher needs to look for ways to collaborate on research reports; and ensuring that the participants voice is represented how they want it represented (Cohen et al., 2011; Cram, 2009).

The **third stage** determined the themes that came out of the interview data collected. This stage addressed the overarching question of this research, which was to find out how the connectedness of Māori affected their self-efficacy within the learning environment. A final hui and shared food was had at this point with all participants to wrap up the data collection phase, to present to the participants a final draft of the findings and discussion, and to have final questions and answers on the process and research. At the conclusion of the hui the teacher and Director participants commented on how engaged, excited, and proud the students were to see their voice represented.

## **Data collection methods**

### **Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group interviews are a method of data collection, which bring together groups of people to respond to questions in a group situation (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005). It is important to identify that focus group interviews do not follow the same format as interviews. Focus groups allow the participants to interact within the group about a question, topic, or theme supplied by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2011). Using this type of method allows for a collective view on some topics hence why the participants interact with each other rather

than the interviewer, it is from the interaction of the group that the data emerges (Cohen et al., 2011; Kvale, 1996; Mutch, 2005).

In the case of this study two focus group interviews were conducted. The first with the student participants, to capture a group of (5) students' voice; and the second with the teacher participants, to capture two teachers' voices. The purpose was to have them interact with specific questions, to let the focus be on them discussing the questions rather than on the interviewer leading the discussion. It was important to centre the students' and teachers' voices in the data collection, and not have the interviewer intervening and disrupting the flow of the conversations with a question answer scenario (Cram, 2009; Kvale, 1996; Cohen et al., 2011). Knowing the participants personally, I knew that they would enjoy the conversation, shared experiences, and storytelling between them (Cram, 2009; Smith, 1999).

I began the focus group interviews with a welcome and karakia, followed by shared food. After this process we began the focus group interview, I explained the purpose of the study and gave the participants a brief on how the focus group would run. There was an opportunity for the participants to ask questions, I reminded them that this was voluntary, and that they had the opportunity to withdraw at any time. Participants were reminded that the interview was going to be voice recorded. The structure of the focus group started with me asking the groups a question, and then allowing them to chat amongst themselves and discuss the question with no limitations – I was there to listen.

I had prepared questions, however, the interview was semi-structured allowing flexibility to stray from the questions where appropriate. The questions for the student focus group fell into two main themes with sub questions and possible probes under each theme: Past experiences of education and experiences of alternative education (Appendix A). The questions for the teacher focus group fell into four main themes: Describing the alternative education environment; Māori student's enjoyment of education; referring schools, their involvement

and what they could do better; and the difference between the school and alternative education environment (Appendix B).

At the conclusion of the focus group participants were thanked for their time, and reminded of the next phase in the process, which was going through a script of the interview. A karakia was said to close the process. The interview data (voice recording) was uploaded to my password protected computer and was transcribed verbatim by myself. Data analysis followed this process, I used an open-coded method of analysing the data, going through the script and re-listening to the voice recording to select themes related to the research questions, a summary reflection was written from this.

### **One-to-one Semi-Structured Interviews**

The term interview is used to describe a particular method used in research to generate data. 'The interview is a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 409). The method of interview allows for the researcher to gain more depth from their participant(s) as opposed to other methods such as surveying. It is important to note that an interview is not like an everyday conversation; an interview has a specific purpose; the interview is constructed and specifically planned rather than naturally occurring; the interview is questions based, where the responses need to be explicit and often detailed (Cohen et al., 2011; Kvale, 1996). The purpose of the interview is similar to that of a transaction taking place between people (interviewer and interviewee), seeking information on the part of one and supplying information on the part of the other. The interview has three purposes: it may be used as a principle means of gathering data, having a direct bearing on the research objectives; it may be used to test hypotheses or to suggest new ones; and it may be used in conjunction with other methods in research undertaking (Cohen et al., 2011).

The interview as a research method is a broad term that encompasses subsets with varying purposes and strategies. There are three widely acknowledged

subsets, Cohen et al. (2011), Mutch (2005) and Given (2008) identify these subsets to be: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. One-to-one semi-structured is the approach that I have adopted in this study. Mutch (2005) defined it as a set of guiding questions, where the interview is open to changes along the way. Mutch (2005) explains semi-structured interviews as allowing the researcher to have a general structure but also have flexibility with the interview for changes along the way, allowing new ideas to be brought up as a result of what the interviewee says; as opposed to structured interviews that have a rigorous set of questions which does not allow for any diversion (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005).

One-to-one semi-structure interviews were conducted with the Director of the alternative education centre and the Police Officer. The focus of the interview with the Director was the big picture of the alternative education. The questions were organised into four main categories with possible probes for each: Big Picture of alternative education; Māori students enjoyment of alternative education; process of enrollment and engagement with the referring schools; and the difference between alternative education and secondary school (Appendix C). The focus of the interview with the Police Officer was around community and the effects of connection on Māori. The questions were organised into four main categories with possible probes for each: connection with the alternative education centre and students; Māori students enjoyment of alternative education; how important is it for Māori to feel connected; and was there a link between a lack of connection with Education and community? And youth offending (Appendix D).

Interviews were arranged to fit the schedules of the participants. Each participant engaged in an hour-long one-to-one interview. At the beginning of each interview the participants were reminded about the purpose of the interview, their rights as a volunteer and their right to withdraw. They were also reminded that the interview would be recorded, and that they would have the opportunity to review and edit the draft transcript, or withdraw their transcript and interview recording at any time. The interview data (voice recording) was

uploaded to my password protected computer and was transcribed verbatim by myself. Data analysis followed this process, I used an open-coded method to analyse the data, going through the script and re-listening to the voice recording to select themes related to the research questions; a summary reflection was written from this.

### **Ethical Considerations, Validity, Authenticity and Reliability**

To help ensure validity, I was reflexive in every step of the research process. This meant that I paid critical attention to my role within this study working to ensure that my personal experiences and bias did not affect the outcome of the study. My position as an insider researcher, in regards to researching children, posed ethical and methodological dilemmas. Therefore, I had to prepare for potential issues before conducting interviews with the student participants. Palmer (2006) suggests that insider researchers, researching children, hold a power imbalance and that the relationship between the researcher and the participants can become complicated. In this instance the insider researcher is more likely to be in a position of power (Palmer, 2006). I conducted a focus group with the student participants rather than one-to-one semi-structured interviews so that the potential power imbalance might be counteracted - by greater student representation. It was important for me not to use my previous role as the manager of the centre to influence or prompt the responses of the student participants. I wanted to collect authentic unbiased data that was not tainted by my own worldview, or experiences.

Another potential issue that may have risen from being an insider researcher was assuming the unspoken (Cohen et al., 2011; Kim, 2012). I knew the environment and the students, which could have potentially increased my level of subjectivity (Kim, 2012). I was conscious of the potential for me to be subjective and 'assume the unspoken', therefore, I ensured that within the focus group interviews I asked for further clarification of students' dialogue. Being an insider researcher contrasted with traditional practices of research, where the researcher would position himself or herself as the 'objective outsider' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

When interviewing participants the insider has an advantage, as they are able to explore communities that can be rather private and remain undisclosed to outsiders (Kim, 2012).

I considered myself to be a 'member' of this particular collective, characterised with a social status – by virtue of the status of belonging, hence I was well positioned to explore the phenomenon under examination (Merton, 1972). Further to this, I was able to grasp sensitive and hidden issues with the participants, and 'short cut' establishing a research relationship. This allowed participants to feel like they could share their experiences openly and honestly because they trusted me, firstly as a Māori, and secondly as a researcher (Cram, 2009; Mercer, 2007).

This study was conducted using a Kaupapa Māori methodology, which further supports an insider approach. Kaupapa Māori research principles are based around the research benefiting Māori. To be able to do this, the research needs to be able to obtain and/ or communicate the people's voice (Cram, 2009). I consider Kaupapa Māori research to be insider research, as to be able to work within this space the researcher must be able to identify as Māori. In contrast with traditional research methods where the researcher was an outsider interviewer (non-Māori), and there were no genealogical link to the Māori culture, the interview data collected would have been limited, or even purposely tainted by Māori participants themselves (Cram, 2009; Smith 1999).

It is important for Māori to be able to trust that the stories and information they disclose is in trusted hands, in the hands of a Māori person, who can represent their voice accurately, to make better for Māori people (Cram, 2009; Smith 1999). Why is this so? Unfortunately, Māori are cautious of other cultures, in particular the European, due to historical events, which have resulted in a lack of trust, and the misrepresentation of Māori voice in European research (Bishop, 2005; Cram, 2009). The student participants already have distrust for society, schooling, European people and their community, which is expressed in their narratives. To be able to gather rich and informative data the researcher must be



someone that they know and trust, who also walks with them in the Māori world.

The peer review process is integral to scholarly research. It is a process of subjecting research methods and findings to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the same field. This process is considered essential, but has also been criticized as slow, ineffective and misunderstood (Cohen et al., 2011). The process is designed to prevent dissemination of irrelevant findings, unwarranted claims, unacceptable interpretations, and personal views (Cohen et al., 2011). It relies on colleagues that review one another's work and make an informed decision about whether it is legitimate, and adds to the larger dialogue or findings in the research field (Cohen et al., 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Mutch, 2005).

The peer-review process will ultimately determine whether or not this study will be adding new dialogue or findings to the field of Māori educational research. From the literature searches that I have conducted I understand that this study will add to the larger dialogue around Māori educational experiences. I have previously explained that there are numerous peer-reviewed articles on the achievement gap conducted by researchers both nationally and international. Contrary to this, research on alternative education environments, and Māori student's voice within the alternative education environment is limited.

Importantly, the Māori student participants interviewed in this study now have a voice, a voice that was overlooked during the Te Kotahitanga, He Kākano, and Kia Eke Panuku research projects. Further to this, and prior to this study, through informal conversations with the Māori students, their families, and the alternative education centre, I ascertained that they too were very keen for their Māori students voice to have representation within research. With one parent commenting that 'these are the forgotten children, forgotten from society and forgotten from their school'. This study may provide a different aspect to consider in discussions concerning the improvement of the educational environments for Māori students, educational policy, and teacher practices alike.

## **Summary**

This chapter presented the research methodology applied in the study. The theoretical framework was discussed to give context to the methodology and methods selected. The methodology was discussed in detail to provide an understanding as to the selection and the right fit for this type of study. The participants and procedures section gave detail to the participants involved in this study. The procedures section spoke to the data collection, where the data collection methods were discussed in detail. To conclude ethical considerations, validity, authenticity and reliability were discussed. Chapter four presents the findings and discussion from the data collected through the focus groups, and interviews.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

### Whakataukī

*He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!*

*What is the most important thing in this world? People! People! People!*

### Overview

This chapter presents the findings from the focus group interviews and the one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The findings are set into three main themes. Theme one presents findings of Tāhuhu Kōrero – Kura, which translates to the past experiences of schooling. Theme two presents findings of Alternative Education – Kura (school) in relation to the alternative education environment and experiences. Theme three presents findings on the Alternative Education Teaching and Learning Approaches. Sub-themes are organised under each of the three main themes. Each theme and sub-theme contains discussion on the findings with reference to the literature review themes within chapter two.

In line with the research question the data collected identified factors that lead to both the disengagement and reengagement of the Māori student participants within this study. This chapter seeks to discuss the disengagement of these students to then better understand the reengagement, and therefore, discuss connectedness of Māori students, to better affect their self-efficacy within a learning environment.

### Introduction

There were four participant groups within this study; a student focus group, a teacher focus group, and one-to-one interviews with the alternative education centre Director and Police Officer. The student focus group consisted of five Māori students, of that group students 1-4 were female and student 5 was male.

The teacher focus group had two participants; teacher 1, a pākehā female; and teacher 2, a male Māori teacher and centre manager. The Director participant was a pākehā female, and the Police Officer participant, a male Māori.

The time afforded to me by the Police Officer participant was much appreciated and some great kōrero was had. However, the data generated from the interview with the Police Officer did not align with, or go towards answering the research question. Both the Police Officer participant and myself discussed some great themes outside of the research focus, which will be addressed in the recommendations for future research section.

It was important in answering the research question: In what ways do the perceptions of connectedness of Māori students in Alternative Education secondary schools affect their self-efficacy within the learning environment, that I gained an understanding and heard the students' perceptions of experiences throughout their levels of education (Bishop, 2005; Bishop et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Once I gained an understanding of their educational journey, only then was I able to have a clearer understanding of their experiences, and perceptions of the alternative education environment.

## **Tāhuhu Kōrero - Kura**

### **Perceptions and Experiences of Primary School**

The student focus group began with a conversation around the student's experiences of primary school, all students in the focus group positively reflected on their experiences of primary school.

*Student 2: "I remember primary school like it was yesterday. Primary school was when my life was actually good. I meet all my friends there... teachers actually helped you, teachers wanted to understand you, they wanted to help you understand what you were doing".*

Student 1, although stating that she had attended four different primary schools, reflected on all of those experiences as being positive.

*“I went to four different primary schools. And the best time of my life was at those schools”.*

The entire group agreed that their experiences of primary school were one of connectedness. They discussed feeling like they were part of a whānau. They described primary school as a time in their education where: they felt that their teachers cared about them, would help them to succeed by working with them, and would take the time to get to know them and their stories. The students spoke of feeling a sense of achievement and enjoying learning at primary school. It was a time where students seemed to have self-efficacy within the learning environment. What the student participants identified as creating connectedness for them in their education at primary school, aligns with what Bell (2011) describes as culturally responsive teaching. Bell (2011) in her book *teaching as a sociocultural practice* emphasises that it is important for educators to make sense of teaching and learning in the classroom, with the main goal being to create an account of human thinking and action. The student narratives of primary school, evidenced particular teachers who seemed to create an account of human thinking, and action to best meet the individual needs of their students.

### **Perceptions and Experiences of Secondary School**

The interview progressed in to questions that focused on the student’s experiences of secondary school.

*Student 2: “As you move on through the schools it’s like everything gets a lot harder but no one’s there to help you – they are only there to do their job – pretty much”.*

*Student 1: "I F\*\*\*EN hated intermediate and college. But don't get me wrong there were some great teachers at college and intermediate – but the majority of them don't even care about the Māori students – they just look at you and already see that you're going to fail, so they don't bother".*

The statement made by student 1 prompted me to ask her if she felt that her experience of secondary school was a racist experience.

*Student 1 replied: "Straight up, yes".*

I was interested in learning more about this response and probed to get to the bottom of why she felt that secondary school was a racist experience.

*Student 1: "It was just like, I would put my hand up in my class and say 'can I have some help' and they would just look over me like I wasn't even there. Like I was non-existent, so I stopped going to my classes".*

*Student 2: "They treated you different because we are black, you know, like we have brains and potential we're just like every other normal person – Caucasian, Chinese, Italian, you know! We are all the same, we all have a brain that needs to be taught and s\*\*t".*

As the students wanted to express their feelings on the topic of racism in secondary school, I continued probing this area. I proceeded to ask them if they felt that there was favouritism between certain races at school.

*Student 1: "Definitely – they want to keep us down so they didn't bother teaching us what we needed to know".*

*Student 5: "Yeah they jump to conclusions..."*

*Student 2: "Hard and your mistakes don't define you".*

*Student 1: "You want to be able to leave your home feeling happy, go to school feeling happy, learning feeling happy, and then returning back home*

*and being happy. But it all just stops because they see, they judge you, they judge you a lot”.*

*Student 1: “Just because they’re a teacher, and older, and mature they are on top of you like you are nothing. They think that they know everything about you just by the clothes you wear, by the way you talk, and the way you walk”.*

*Student 2: “A lot of the teachers in the school used to pick on the Māori kids. A teacher came up to me and actually pulled kutus out of my hair – yet there would be white people with nits in their hair and the teacher wasn’t doing that to them”.*

After hearing the experience that student 2 shared, I proceeded to ask how that particular situation made her feel.

*Student 2: “It actually used to make me cry. The moment that you think that you’re nothing in class, you stop going to the classes. You stop wanting to talk to the teachers. And then it just makes the whole situation worse”.*

*Student 2: “Some teachers they don’t try to understand the background that you come from and that it’s hard to learn, to get to school, to pay for class trips, to provide lunch you know”.*

*Student 2: “Intermediate teachers and college teachers they were just there to do their job, they didn’t care – they didn’t give a f\*\*k about you – like – they didn’t give a f\*\*k about anything but their money”.*

Students began to reflect on specific teachers in secondary school who they felt a disconnection with, or had a negative experience with.

*Student 4: “I would be trying my hardest and I would be doing my work and asking questions and everything. When I was finished my work she would bring it back to me and say that’s not good enough, re-do it all. And she just did that to me all the time. There was no reason”.*

*Student 2: "They are all a bit two faced... They used to give me all the answers, because they couldn't be bothered teaching me because I was too dumb to understand... I knew the words and stuff that I had to do. I just didn't understand what they story was... I didn't understand big words".*

*Student 5: "Like me, cause I can't write properly for some reason, like f\*\*k I can't write. They tell you to do the work again because they can't read it... It made me feel p\*\*\*ed off... I just used to grab my book and put my head under it".*

*Student 2: "They put no effort into it aye, they would just give you the answers to get you over with".*

Equally, students remembered the few mainstream secondary school educators in their lives that made a positive impact. They described the qualities of these teachers as:

*Student 2: "He didn't treat me like I was naughty, he treated me like I was a white person – like he gave me time... I did more in that year, than I actually did in my whole life... He had high expectations in general. He understood my background and he gave me another chance to actually prove myself".*

*Student 4: "She was probably the only teacher that tried to help me.... I didn't feel stupid, she helped me through a lot of s\*\*t. Actually, like helped me do my work".*

The student's experiences of feeling discriminated against at secondary school, in an environment that should be safe and supportive for every student, was emotional to hear as an educator. Being in the room with these students, seeing their emotions, body language, and hearing their tone is something that is difficult to communicate on paper. The student narratives identified when the disconnection began for them, and unanimously it was during intermediate school.



The students shared stories of times where they felt that fairness and constancy was not applied, and where teachers would pre-judge them because of their ethnicity - using their position of power to their advantage, as described by the student participants. The students felt that their teachers already had low expectations for both their behaviour and academic achievement because of their ethnicity. Students expressed that they felt that their teachers had a low tolerance for their behaviour, and actions compared to that of students from other races. The students explained that the teachers could not be bothered to explain work to them, so would give them the answers instead. Students commented on the lack of understanding of their situation or background, and felt little attempt by their teachers to make a connection.

These detailed perceptions and accounts of these Māori students' experiences of the secondary school learning environment are not new. Similar narratives have been expressed from interview data collected within the Te Kotahitanga research project (Bishop et al., 2003). Interviews had with year 9 and 10 mainstream secondary school students within the Te Kotahitanga project identified similar barriers to learning as identified by the alternative education students within this study (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2003). This gives rise to the claims of an education debt being owed to Māori (Bishop, 2008, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006). The experiences that these Māori students have faced within their mainstream learning environments are the same as what was identified in the Te Kotahitanga research project (Bishop et al., 2003). Despite the implementation of the Effective Teaching Profile in mainstream secondary schools, it seems that these Māori students are still facing the same discrimination, and disconnect several years on.

In being able to identify teachers who negatively impacted on these students educational journey, the student participants equally remembered the few mainstream secondary school educators who made a positive impact. They described the qualities of these teachers as: Teachers that did not prejudge; that worked through their lapse in judgement and didn't hold that moment in time over them; that did not let students mistakes define their future; that treated

them like *white* people; teachers that made connections, and got to know their students stories, interests and strengths; had empathy and compassion; empowered them; had high expectations; and helped them in their learning, ensuring that work was at their level. Students explained having a connection with these teachers, wanting to attend their classes, wanting to complete the class work, and having a sense of achievement within their learning environments.

The narratives from the alternative education students describe teachers who could be identified as culturally responsive practitioners (Bell, 2006; Bishop 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2009), and who seem to apply (knowingly or unknowingly) the identified Effective Teaching Profile (Bishop & Berryman, 2009) within their teaching practice: Manaakitanga; Mana motuhake; Whakapiringatanga; Wānanga; Ako; and Kotahitanga (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop et al., 2009). These identified effective teachers could be described by the Te Kotahitanga project as agents of change (Bishop, 2014; Bishop et al., 2014).

As useful as the Effective Teaching Profile (Bishop & Berryman, 2009) has been in transforming the educational experience for Māori learners, it could be argued through these students' narratives, that despite the efforts of Te Kotahitanga not all teachers are culturally responsive. The alternative education Māori students in this study have experienced practitioners that have negatively affected their learning journey, self-efficacy, mana, and confidence. This is where the claims made by Bishop (2008, 2010) and Ladson-Billings (2006) around assessing the extent of an education debt being owed to Māori, and then looking at policy and implementation from government level, and changes to teacher education are valid claims.

## Māori in Mainstream Education

We discussed the student participants' perception of the treatment of Māori in mainstream secondary school learning environments. Some of this dialogue is expressed below:

*Student 2: "Like your family are like, go and pick up your little brother from Kohanga, and then you go and pick up your brother, and they are drinking. They are like go make dinner for them – so you go make dinner. Then f\*\*\*en yup that's all good but you forgot to do your homework. Then the teacher is like 'why isn't your homework done?' and you tell them why. They would be thinking that it was just an excuse, but it was my reality".*

*Student 1: "I've got 12 siblings, I help my mum look after the kids... I would help my mum get them all ready. And by the time I was finished I would be late for school... Then the next day they would be like 'where were you? Wagging with your friends again'. And I would be like no, I was actually looking after my sibling's".*

*Student 2: "Some of us grew up the hard way, got massive hidings and s\*\*t... but like ummm, a lot of people are different aye. We are all raised differently, it doesn't affect our learning".*

*Student 3: "The teachers just don't expect us to achieve because we are Māori, because they think that we are dumb".*

Following these comments I asked the students if they wanted to succeed at school.

*Student 1: "Definitely".*

*Student 2: "Hard".*

*Student 5: "Yeah so I can get a job and earn some money".*

*Student 1: "I wanted to learn at school, I just didn't want to learn from those specific teachers".*

*Student 2: "If she was real with us I would have wanted to learn".*

There is a strong link between the *perceptions and experiences of secondary school* theme and this theme. Some of the discussion within this theme will refer to student narrative contained in the previous theme. It is important to note that the theme of *Māori in mainstream education* needed to be a separate discussion to the previous theme, as there are some bold narratives to be discussed specific to Māori in mainstream education.

Student's perceptions of how Māori are treated in mainstream secondary school environments were articulated in depth and with ease. The students had strong opinions on this focus area, with all student participants expressing that they felt that Māori *are* treated differently in mainstream secondary school learning environments. Generally, the comments were around a lack of understanding of these students lived realities – a sense of judgement featured highly. However, despite their circumstances the student participants reinforced that they wanted to learn and succeed at school. The students expressed that it was due to their teachers' prejudice and lack of empathy around their circumstances, that created *the disconnect* within the mainstream secondary school learning environment.

Bell (2011), Bishop & Berryman (2009), and Bruner (1999) highlight the importance of learners being able to bring themselves culturally into the classroom as this is vital to their success. Viewing education as a *social* and *cultural* practice, highlighting culture as a system of values, rights, exchanges, obligatory opportunities, and power within society (Bell, 2011; Bruner, 1999; Hein, 1991). The fact that these students felt that their culture was not accepted by certain teachers, and that they could not bring themselves culturally into the classroom goes towards explaining their disconnect, and lack of self-efficacy within the mainstream secondary school learning environment.

This disconnection could also be attributed to historic events in education such as the Native Schools Act 1867, where Māori learners were segregated from the non-Māori learners and made to attend Native Schools. Native schools were

taught through the medium of English with only manual instruction, while non-Māori were educated through the academic streams in state schools (Bishop, 2005; Orange, 2013). Historically, there were low expectations for Māori to achieve academically, therefore, possibly accounting for the sensitivity around the issue of low expectations within the learning environment for these students. I got the sense that the student participants wanted to defend the fact that they weren't 'dumb', as they have been made to feel like they are 'dumb' through past teachers' practices, words, and actions.

In explaining their reasons for feeling that there were low expectations imposed on them, the student gave specific examples. They spoke of being given the answers by teachers, mostly being ignored when asking for help, and that teachers were not willing to work with them. The students identified the fact that they weren't treated like a *white person*. Student 2, when reflecting on a positive experience with a mainstream educator noted that the teacher "*didn't treat me like I was naughty he treated me like I was a white person... high expectations in general... gave me another chance to actually prove myself*". Through these student narratives it could be argued that both teachers and Māori students are still effected by deficit theorising, and an intergenerational idea that Māori are not capable of abstract thinking (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2005, 2010).

Further to this, throughout the student narratives they referred to themselves as *black*, and the other students as *white*. Like one race is inferior to the other, these students feel that racial discrimination, and deficit thinking still exist in mainstream learning environments (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2005; Orange, 2013). Bishop (2005, 2010) explains that centuries of a Eurocentric education system, pākehā domination, deficit thinking, and a monoculture society has led to Māori feeling disconnected to society, and in turn education. Ladson-Billings (2006) speaks to the drop-outs, poor behaviour, disengaged students and poor achievement as being a historical problem; promoting the need for an education debt to be explored in resolving the educational issues for Māori (Bishop, 2005). For these students to be able to identify, describe, and understand their *place* in

the learning environment as a second class citizen to that of their *white peers*, has me questioning: have we as a society really moved on from deficit theorising? And do we have a social and cultural class system? (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2005, 2008, 2010).

The alternative education students narratives speak to their disconnection and disengagement, which is of concern. These Māori students are feeling disconnected from mainstream education, much the same as the student narratives within the Te Kotahitanga project (Bishop, 2005, 2010; Bishop & Berryman, 2009). Therefore, the national achievement gap, high numbers of Māori enrolments into alternative Education (Education Review Office, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2009a), and the economic gap will exist until a connection to the mainstream learning environment is created for Māori students, and historic debts are repaid (Bishop, 2005, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2010; Nash, 2003; Pearson, 2012; Rashbrooke, 2013; Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

## **Alternative Education – Kura**

### **Alternative Education**

The Private Training Establishment that is being researched is a category one training establishment. A category one is challenging for a training organisation to achieve, and speaks to how highly functioning this particular organisation is. I was afforded the time to sit with the Director and discuss one strand of her business, which is the alternative education centre.

Background:

*Director     “AE is contracted in various ways across the country. With the schools allowed to contract out however they like as long as they meet the ministry guidelines. Either the school run their own AE or the other option is that schools will contract it out to a provider, and in this case we are a private training establishment (PTE)... As a private*

*training establishment we have accreditation, which means that we can deliver unit standard based programmes”.*

I asked if the funding for alternative education was enough.

*Director: “The minister would think that it’s a high amount, the funding that we get is used to pay for all of our teachers wages, all of our overheads, all of our expenses, all of our vehicles – because we pick the students up and drop them off... We can pay maybe between \$38,000 and \$48,000 per year for each staff member and that’s only because we have 32 kids”.*

*Director: “A normal teacher would get paid well compared to these teachers and our teachers pick the kids up at 8am in the morning on the van run and drop them off at 4pm in the afternoon. They work from 8am – 4pm with the kids. They don’t get a break at all and that’s Monday to Friday. In the school holidays they are here doing PD and their planning and all that sort of thing so it’s really tough”.*

The Director of the this particular alternative education centre describes an environment: that is under resourced with physical resources, wrap around services, and space; that attracts low ministerial funding compared to mainstream secondary schools; and where staff are underpaid, with harder working conditions compared to teachers teaching in mainstream secondary schools. The Director described an organisation that puts the students at the heart of all of their decision making – I felt a strong sense that this organisation knew their students well.

I gained the impression that this centre puts their students first as the centre practices were discussed with me. Practices such as addressing barriers for poor attendance through providing *free* transport for all students to and from the venue, and by having smaller class sizes to address students’ educational needs within the learning environment. The decisions made by this centres leadership

team, and their ability to be able to recognise, address, and resolve barriers to their students success is an identified strength of this organisation, and could be attributed to the success of their Māori students. The Education Review Office Report on alternative education centres (2010) identified leadership and team-work as one of the *critical success factors* underpinning the good practice of these providers.

The culturally responsive pedagogy of relations within the Te Kotahitanga programme highlighted two overarching aims. The second of these aims was for professionals in education to know and understand how to bring about change in Māori students educational achievement, by being professionally committed to doing so (Bishop et al., 2014). The alternative education centre in this study bring about change to their disengaged Māori students educational achievement by addressing identified barriers to their learning. They use the knowledge that they have of their students, and access different funding streams within the organisations budget to be able to address these barriers. By providing free transport for the students it enables them to be able to achieve high rates of attendance, and therefore strengthens the students' chance of academic success (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2014). These factors seemed to be key contributing factors to Māori students' success and improvement in their overall wellbeing.

### **Referring School**

Does the referring school bring the student along and introduce them to the alternative education centre?

*Director: "No, occasionally a school might, but no they normally just send us the paper work, we get in touch with the family, make an appointment, have a meeting with them and then the kids will start the next day".*

I asked if the referring school stayed connected with the student while they were attending alternative education, as this is a responsibility of the referring school.



*Director: "There hasn't been any, prior to this year there has been none. Prior to this year I would say that the student felt that they were kicked to AE, and the school didn't want to have anything to do with them unless they played up and were going to be excluded from us".*

*Teacher 1: "Nah, nah we generally try to push for that but nah they don't".*

*Teacher 2: "They are interested for funding and stats sake because of what they have to report to the ministry".*

*Teacher 1: "It's all about what the school benefits out of it really not what's actually happening with the child".*

Do you feel that the schools are interested in having their students back?

*Director: "I've owned the business since 2009 and we have had the occasional student go back to school. We have had probably 7 kids over that amount of time and I would say that 3 of those succeeded".*

Are there some students that you wonder why they have been sent to alternative education?

*Director: "Oh, always... you have ones that just weren't engaged at school, disliked their teachers and were naughty. Or there are kids who have been bullied and aren't coping with being at school and are just being truant".*

Do you feel that some of those students could have been dealt with in the school system?

*Director: "Personally, I think that the school system that we have just doesn't suit lots of kids... There is also a whole lot of kids who are sitting in school that aren't engaged and they don't have direction but they are just good, they haven't pushed the boundaries, and so haven't come up on a radar".*

*Teacher 1: "Personally I don't see there to be any reason why any of our students should be excluded from mainstream education. Schools need to expand their horizons. Ministry of education gets large enough funding so I can't understand why they can't make exceptions within their environments for all students".*

*Teacher 2: "Yes and No. They would need to design a different part of their forest because they are not knowledgeable to a lot of the diverse realities of our young people. It's more like you come into our factory and you are going to look like this model of student, and so there is always going to be this side stream that is never going to fit that system ever".*

Do you get enough information from the referring schools?

*Director: "Usually it's a list of their bad attendance and a record of what the kids have done wrong, it's always about what they have done wrong".*

*Student 2: "When I first started here the DP told me that I would be ok and that she would pop in and check on me sometime. She never actually came".*

*Director: "The connection between the AE and schools is really bad it's just such a disconnect".*

*Student 1: "They didn't want to know me when I first started going and then when I excelled, when I was getting 100% attendance and all of my grades were 100%, they were like oh yip that's our student and I was like 'no that's f\*\*\*en not – that's the AE student'".*

Transition process from the referring schools.

*Teacher 2: "They already come with notes, there is already a story... The school just basically flick and run. They have had all of their last touches on the students... We have our interview... and in that interview I am basically down loading and uploading data, and they are basically*

*doing the same thing with me and the environment. From that point they are making connections, how does this place function? What is this place going to look like for me when I get here? They can leave that interview thinking phew, I can do this. A lot of them come into the interview super anxious because they have heard all of these stories. I always look for the whakawhanaunga aspect”.*

*Teacher 1: “What it boils down to is a lack of understanding when you look at a lot of teachers in mainstream. I am speaking from my opinion from when I was teaching in mainstream and that’s why I left”.*

The narratives from the student, teacher, and Director participants detailed the level of involvement of the referring schools with this alternative education centre. All three participant groups described the initial enrolment process right through to the amount of contact, and support that the referring school provided once the student was attending alternative education. All three participant groups described the referring schools as disengaged, expressing the feeling that the referring schools had, had their final touches with the students and just wanted to get rid of them.

The Director and the teacher participants described their experiences with the referring schools as one of a cold process, where paper work detailing the students ‘rap sheet’ would be sent through as the schools entire referral process. What was identified by all of the participant groups was disappointment in the fact that the referring schools do not attempt to have a connection with their students or the centre - despite being encouraged to by the centre’s leadership and teachers. It was identified that the lack of support for the students by the referring school only contributed to the already strained connection between the student and their referring school. Therefore, creating minimal chance of the student wanting to reintegrate back to their referring school. Student 2 mentioned a promise made by a Deputy Principal to visit and keep in contact while she was attending alternative education, however, this was never followed through.

The narratives of the participants in this study conflict with what the Ministry of Education expects of the referring schools. The Ministry of Education state that the referring schools are responsible for enrolling their students into an alternative education provider, and are expected to maintain oversight of their students while they are attending alternative education (Ministry of Education, 2016a). Despite the Ministry of Education requiring the referring school to have oversight of their students while they are attending alternative education, it is clear that this is not being practiced at this particular centre.

The unfortunate outcome of this lack of interest that the referring schools seem to have in their students, could be a contributing factor to why these students do not want to reintegrate back to mainstream. Students expressed feeling 'kicked' to alternative education and 'forgotten about'. The Director highlighted that over her nine years of owning the business, only seven students went back to their referring school, and of those seven only three succeeded in that environment. The Ministry of Education (2016a) has the intention for alternative education students to reintegrate back to their referring school. However, this is not happening at this centre due to the students feeling abandoned by their referring school resulting in a complete disconnection.

The teacher participants made comment that they felt that the schools only stay in contract from an administrative level, as they need to report the students' attendance to gain funding. The student, teacher and Director participants all shared a belief that most of the students who are referred to alternative education should not have been. They felt that the alternative education referrals came down to: large class sizes; a lack of understanding of their students; unwillingness to work with, and understand their students; and lack of flexibility by the school and individual teachers in regards to certain students circumstances.

A suggestion from teacher 2 was that schools need to 'design a different part of their forest', as they are not knowledgeable to a lot of the diverse realities of these young people. The teacher participants described mainstream secondary

school as a 'factory' and that students go into the 'factory' and end up looking like a certain model of student. They believed that from their experiences that there is always going to be a side stream that is never going to fit the mainstream system. This brings about a wider discussion around students fitting the system or should the system be meeting the students' needs? Bell (2011), Bishop and Berryman, (2009), and Bruner (1999) speak to student success coming down to allowing students to bring their cultures into the classroom, and that not every student learns, thinks, and creates meaning in the same way (Bell, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch; 1991). Therefore, teachers and schools need to engage in effective teaching interactions with Māori students as Māori, redesigning their *factory* to cater for all of their learners, and learner needs.

### **Misconceptions**

A topic of conversation that came up in all three interviews with the students, teachers and Director was around the theme of misconceptions of alternative education. It was interesting as this was *not* a topic that I had planned to discuss in the focus groups or interviews, however, all three groups felt that they needed to get their message across on this theme.

*Student 2: "Hey Kat, can you also put in there that not everyone that comes to AE is naughty, like the environment and people look at us like we are naughty kids".*

*Student 1: "No, no we are not".*

*Student 2: "Like YJ (youth justice), that's what they look at us like, but really we are not. A lot of us have some pretty good behaviour. We have a lot of potential it just doesn't get to show because they make you feel like we are c\*\*p at school. They have pretty much given us something to do and we couldn't achieve it and so then we give up. It made us feel like s\*\*t and close off".*

*Teacher 1: "I think that these kids are just misunderstood. At large".*

Director: *"The issue that I have with schools is that the kids come here going 'I got threatened that I was going to come' and 'if you don't be good you will go to AE', 'it's a shit hole, it's an awful place, you get beaten up and all this stuff'".*

Director: *"I think you get a reputation and then get used as a dumping ground so parents and students don't see it as an alternative option they see it as a dumping ground".*

Director: *"They actually prefer it here as it's a smaller environment, someone cares about them they know all the people in the organisation and it's a little bit more relaxed".*

Director: *"Our kids just love the fact that are with one person all day, they do all of the subjects still but they are with that one person".*

What I took from the participants wanting to ensure that there were no misconceptions about alternative education was a great sense of connectedness and pride to the alternative education environment. This impromptu discussion cemented for me that the students felt connected to the alternative education environment, this showed in the level of care and concern that they had in protecting and defending the reputation of alternative education. The students were particularly concerned with how the community and their referring schools viewed alternative education, and felt that they wanted to set the record straight.

The students viewed themselves as having good behaviour in the right learning environment, and that they did not want to be put into the same category as the Youth Justice children. The students identified that they have potential, but felt that they never got the chance to explore their potential at secondary school due to being made to feel like *crap*. The teacher participants felt that the majority of the alternative education students are just misunderstood. Māori view relationships as most important in people being able to work in partnership with one another: relationships between students, school-wide, and with community (Bishop, 2005; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Te Ara, 2016).

The fact that the student participants did not feel like they had a positive relationship with their mainstream secondary school teachers made it difficult for them to feel connected, or valued members of that environment (Bishop, 2005; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). In understanding this we can understand that the students are not bad students as they have identified themselves, they just did not feel a sense of belonging to their learning environment. The adolescent mind does not know and is not equipped yet to channel this feeling of disconnect and rejection, therefore, truancy and poor behaviour are the result (Bishop et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

The three participant groups made comment that mainstream school educators threaten students with alternative education, making it out to be an awful place, rather than an alternative option for education (Ministry of Education, 2016a). This could be perceived as exercising a power imbalance, and using threats to control student behaviour in mainstream, this would not help in building a connection or sense of belonging for these priority learners who already feel disconnected (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2005; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). It was evident through these narratives and the way that the students spoke about the alternative-education, learning environment through defending its mana, that the environment has created strong relationships and connections to provide a sense of belonging for these students (Bishop, 2005; Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, 2016).

### **Connection to the Learning Environment**

I asked the students, teachers and Director to explain the alternative education environment to me. Student 5's response was *"Fucken gangster"*. Student 1 followed student 5's response with *"Causal as"*. Not wanting to assume that these responses meant a positive connection to alternative education, I asked for more detail.

*Student 1: "Because the tutors are real... She's one of the realest tutors that I have ever had... because we aren't discriminated against".*

*Student 5: "You can learn something here".*

*Student 3: "Our tutor tries her hardest to help us and like be there for us".*

*Student 4: "Because it's just so much fun and you're learning in the process of having fun".*

*Student 1: "Yeah, because they know that we can achieve and that we are as good as any other student in school".*

*Student 2: "Our teachers here give us another chance even when we have f\*\*\*ed up already".*

*Student 5: "You can work and talk at the same time without being told off... they talk to us like bros not idiots".*

*Student 1: "AE tutors, they're not stuck up anal c\*\*\*s, you know that think they're better than you... They are here to help you get your credits. And they try and help you hard out".*

*Student 3: "Yeah we got heaps of different types of levels at this course so we can learn off one another. We do learn off one another. We do pick up things off one another".*

*Student 4: "Yeah like if one of us have finished our work we help everyone else instead of being made to let them figure it out".*

*Student 5 "We get picked up on vans and a bus".*

*Student 1: "We don't need to pay for the buses and vans to get here".*

*Student 5: "And the tutors take the time out of their day to come and pick us up".*

*Student 1: "At school we had to pay a whole school fee just to get on the bus".*

The teachers described the alternative education environment as follows:

*Teacher 1: "The main thing is that it is Whānau oriented, we create/ have a more holistic approach to education. We have smaller class sizes and are more whānau oriented. Everyone is on board helping each other out".*

*Teacher 2: "Yeah I agree, to the whole whānau approach and creating a safe space. I see AE as place where staff and students help create a tūrangawaewae – a place to stand. It helps the Māori students to*



*have that neutral zone which they can come to as a safe space – like it's a home away from home".*

In this the tutors and Director discussed that they fed the students out of their own pockets and that it was not a big deal, it was just what they did.

*Director: "Our teachers find the good in the kids, and sometimes we have to let stuff go because they're just being teenagers. With a school like this with 10 kids in your class you notice stuff... You have that opportunity and flexibility to do that here whereas at school the kids plays up and gets sent to the dean".*

When speaking about the alternative education environment Student 4 stated *"We are a family"*. This comment then triggered the other students to comment.

*Student 1: "Hard we are a family'.*

*Student 2: "We are not like a family we are one".*

As the students spoke so heart felt about their connection to the alternative education environment and their teachers, I wanted to find out how this bond was formed.

*Student 1: "I've only been here for 3 weeks and I feel like I fit in properly. Like I can come here and be myself".*

*Student 5: "Because we are all the same here... the teachers talk to you on the same level".*

*Student 1: "They get to know you on a personal level. They will get to know you so that they understand where you are coming from".*

*Student 5: "Sometimes here you don't even need to pay for stuff they just let you go".*

*Student 2: "I feel like our teacher here does more of a job than what teachers do in school. She does a lot for her students".*

*Student 1: "Hard".*

*Student 2: "Our teachers actually choose to connect with us".*

This theme follows the theme of *misconceptions*, as this is where the participants were able to discuss the environment in more detail. The alternative education environment was described by the teacher and student participant groups as: a safe environment free from violence, drugs and temptation; whānau orientated; high trust environment; where teachers go above and beyond for the students; where teachers genuinely care about their students; and flexibility with personal circumstances, and learning styles is exercised regularly. Both teacher participants discussed the importance of building *trust* with their students. The teacher participants knew that by keeping to their word that they would earn the respect of their students. The reason that they identified *trust* as an important aspect in building a connection with their Māori students was that they knew that *trust* had been abused by adults in their life. Therefore, students that had, had their trust abused were described by their teachers as very sceptical, and aware of untrusting behaviours such as not keeping to your word.

Both teacher participants stated that if the students noticed them taking an interest, going above and beyond, and really working for them then the students would commit to getting their work done. What is interesting to note is that the alternative education student's situational and environmental circumstances were no different from when they attended mainstream education to when they attended alternative education. This cancels out deficit theorising and discussion around the home environment, socio-economic status, family make up, and situational/ environmental experiences, as reasons why these students *fail* in the mainstream system (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2010; Bishop et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Deficit theorising labels and blames Māori students, their home environments, and their upbringing for their failure at school (Bishop, 2010; Bishop et al., 2003). However, from the student participants' narratives on their experiences and perceptions of mainstream secondary school, the blame could rightfully fall with mainstream educators for where these students have ended up in their educational journey (Bishop, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Orange, 2013).

What these students thrived on was having an environment where they felt valued and respected, and an environment where they belonged. The student's perception of mainstream school is that of power and control, with little flexibility, understanding, or care of individuals lived realities. Whereas, they described alternative education as a safe place, a place where they were cared for, where their mana was found and nurtured, and where the teachers helped them to succeed. They spoke of alternative education as feeling equal to the other students and teachers, where teachers related with them and saw their potential. Bell (2011), and Bishop and Berryman (2009) describe power-sharing as important in teacher practice and creating a connection with your students. Students reflected on how the teachers in alternative education gave them a chance to correct their mistakes and poor behaviour, not holding their educational future ransom to one bad decision.

The culture of care went well beyond classroom hours and was described by the teacher participants and director as being a way of life, a passion. The students reflected on the different types of academic levels, and that at alternative education they were allowed to work with, and support their peers academically – creating a community of learners (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). The teachers referred to the learning environment as place where staff and students help create a *tūrangawaewae* – a place to stand. Helping Māori students to have a neutral zone in which they can come to as a safe space – like it is a home away from home. This is achieved by teachers getting to know the students on a personal level, what makes them tick, their story, their interests, personal challenges. Working with the student to rebuild them, and find their strengths and mana again. With student 2 stating 'our teachers actually choose to connect with us'.

## Alternative Education Teaching and Learning Approaches

### Centre and Teacher Practices

In speaking with the Director I asked her. What do you feel that your teachers do differently from mainstream teachers?

*Director: "The teachers do everything, at morning tea time the teachers play cards with the kids. They pick them up, I mean you're the bus driver, you hear their stories. You're there you know what's going on with that kid, and I think that makes a big difference".*

*Director: "Always noticing what is going on for the students, if the student doesn't have something to eat then the teachers will go and organise something".*

In speaking with the teacher participants I asked them if the teachers that worked in alternative education are qualified by the education council's standards.

*Teacher 2: "They are qualified for AE but they are not qualified for mainstream".*

*Teacher 1: "Even in mainstream you can be qualified, but are you qualified to work with the youth. You can be qualified in the sense that you have a certificate hanging on your wall saying that you went to university but it doesn't say if you can work with Jonny over there".*

*Teacher 2: "You're qualified to be a factory worker but are you're qualified to be a free range worker? You know what I mean, and that's a whole different skill set".*

*Teacher 1: "Education is continually changing so if you want to be qualified to work with the rangitahi you have to focus and look at the changes that are happening in society, and get educated in that respect, and qualified in that respect. That's where the skills are lacking".*

I then asked the teachers how they engaged their students.

*Teacher 2: "We have karakia in the mornings, then spend that first term building that rapport, and establishing boundaries".*

*Teacher 1: "The big focus in the first few weeks is creating that rapport, having those one on ones and engagement. Getting to hear their story, and having them open up. A massive thing that I do with the older ones is teaching them life skills. They are so used to having that free run so you need to bring them in and be strong and tight with them, have the structure, the routine and the discipline because that next step for them is to get into the workforce or go to polytechnic".*

*Teacher 1: "What we mainly expect is attendance, work ethic, respect – not just at course but in the wider community when we are out on trips. Showing them that they do have the skill and capability to actually stand on their own two feet to make that next transition".*

*Teacher 1: "Anyone is capable of achieving. If you have someone come in here that has a behaviour list that is a book long it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter what the book says – work with the students and step them up. I would say that my expectations are quite high because as far as I am concerned anyone can achieve. But it's up to the individual to do it and up to the teacher to coach them and guide them in the right way to excel".*

How do you get the students to achieve, in particular the Māori students?

*Teacher 1: "They need to see that you are there supporting them 100%. I have had a student that I have had here for a week now, and he said that he wanted to be a butcher so I said 'mean – you need to turn up for the whole week to start with, then we will look at getting you into some work experience'. Now he is on board and is smashing out NCEA credits because he has an understanding that I am actually there helping him, and wanting him to achieve".*

*Teacher 2: "My thing is to build trust. Because without trust there is no relationship".*

*Teacher 1: "If they think that you're a 's\*\*t talker' they won't have that respect or trust for you and your word. They are not going to attend because they will get to know quickly if you're talking s\*\*t".*

*Teacher 2: "Their trust has been abused by adults around them, teachers and others around them".*

*Teacher 1: "It's not only their past teachers, a lot of the kids we get have come through the Child, Youth, and Family (CYF) system and let's face it social workers aren't legit with them".*

*Teacher 2: "Trust can be built in a many ways. I use all different modes of delivering content, a hikoi, or a swim, or a trip in a van to me are all different modes of delivering learning and experimenting with trust. It's not just sitting in class, and here is your book that's not going to build a trust relationship".*

*Teacher 1: "We talk on their level to build that trust and relationship with them. It might be that you go in there every morning and give them a hand shake and say 'sup bro'. You have got to bring yourself down to meet them and then slowly build them up and that's how the kids know who is genuine and who is not".*

*Teacher 1: "Every morning we have a whānau hui so every morning we get up and address the situations, behaviours and whatever needs to be addressed and I give them the floor. They get to have a chance to talk too".*

What is it, what is the magic bullet?

*Teacher 2: "You have got to have a passion for what you're doing otherwise you're just turning up".*

*Teacher 1: "If you're working with youth it's not just a job, you have to have the passion. And your passion has to be that you are motivated to help these students make a change in their lives".*

*Teacher 2: "You have to make it apart of your world otherwise you're not going to survive.... Find your why? This is a privilege, I see it as a privilege".*

*Teacher 2: "These are the diverse realities of our people. A lot of the students and their families, their reality is not what mainstream society would consider as being normal. The way I treat that is with a bit of humility to step into that person's world. You're going to naturally pass judgement on certain things but you have to back up and try to see the person, and the content, and their story, and the bigger picture".*

How is poor behaviour managed?

*Teacher 1: "You have got to let them calm down on their own and you have to be calm yourself. When they are feeling like that if you are in their face they will naturally direct that anger at you. So you let them have their tantrum and after its finished invite them to go to the kitchen to sit down, have a coffee, and a chat".*

*Teacher 2: "I only yell if there is a fire or if I have to compete with their volume levels at break time".*

*Teacher 1: "They are used to getting yelled at constantly and back handed and all sorts of stuff so you need to react differently to what they know, and that's a shock to their system".*

I also asked the students if they had outbursts, and how behaviour was managed in the alternative education setting.

*Student 2: "Yeah hard"*

*Student 5: "Yeah hard I had one the other day".*

*Student 1: "Our teacher lets us go off and release our anger, then we come back and are like sorry".*

*Student 5: "When I was at school there would be teachers that won't give you your space, and they will come up to you and be like 'what are you going to do, what are you going to do'".*

*Student 1: "Yes".*

*Student 2: "Yes oi".*

*Student 5: "F\*\*k yeah".*

*Student 2: "F\*\*\*en hard".*

*Student 1: "Yeah a lot of teachers are like that they push you hard all the time. And they are like I'm a teacher and you're a student. They say stuff like 'respect me, respect me' and I'm like f\*\*k".*

*Student 5: "F\*\*k some of them stand over you and challenge you".*

I said to the students that it sounded like their alternative education teachers approach is the opposite of a challenge.

*Student 4: "She will come up to you and be like, what's wrong, what's up".*

*Student 1: "And because you can trust her aye, you can trust her not to go off and talk".*

*Student 2: "This one time I didn't know that we were having a shared lunch and I packed a s\*\*\*\*y because I wasn't told. And she goes 'oi, what's your problem' and I said 'f\*\*\*en nothing' and then I slammed the door. She followed me and puts her arm around me and said 'what's the matter' in a calm way after I had just spoken to her like that. See now if I was in college and said that to a teacher I would have gone straight to the bad books".*

*Student 1: "Yeah like "don't you talk to authority like that".*

*Student 2: "At school it would have been get out of my class, get to the dean's office, why do you even bother coming".*

The narratives explain a centre and teacher practices that go far beyond what is expected of an educator. The student, teacher, and director participants highlighted that the alternative education teachers do everything: from picking the students up in the morning; to helping the students work through personal issues; to teaching them; interacting with the students during break times; working with the students and their social services; the teachers feed them; make home visits; take them to work and/or sport; and drop them off home. The role that these teachers take on is far more than a teaching role. These teachers know their students lived realities, have empathy for their situations, and know what they can do to help make a difference in these students' lives.



Following on from the *connection to the learning environment* theme and the importance that the alternative education teachers place on building trust is the way in which they view their role as an educator. The alternative education teacher participants that I interviewed viewed their role as more than just delivering content. Both teachers spoke of feeling privileged to be teaching these students, stating that 'your passion has to be motivated by helping the students'. In discussing teaching as a socio-cultural practice Bell (2011) identified eight features of culturally responsive pedagogy. One of the eight features involved forming relationships with students for *professional caring*, and a commitment that students will achieve academically, essentially where teaching is viewed as a relational practice. The student, teacher and Director narratives essentially describe the teachers in this centre as exceptional relational practitioners. Along with the centre putting their students at the heart of their decision-making, are teachers who exhibit strong relational practice and culturally responsive teaching, all of which could attribute to these students success and reengagement in learning.

The alternative education teachers interviewed professionally care about their students. This is supported by Director, student and teacher narratives. The teacher participants stated that it was important for them to always notice what was going on for their students, and if a student did not have anything to eat, or was out of character, it was a priority to address before any learning could take place. By these teachers applying a humanistic approach with their students, dispelling deficit theorising, and ensuring that their students holistic needs are met, they are giving their students the best chance of success (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2005; Bishop & Berryman, 2009). The student participants expressed feeling cared for, and acknowledged how much their teachers did for them outside of the classroom. The student participants viewed their alternative-education, learning environment and teachers as a *whānau*, and that *manaakitanga* and *whanaungatanga* are at the forefront in what creates connectedness to this learning environment (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2006, 2009; Te Ara, 2016).

The alternative education teachers viewed their teaching style as different to the majority of mainstream secondary school teachers. With both alternative education teachers having had previously worked in the mainstream environment, they felt that they could speak from experience. They both felt that the majority of secondary school teachers were qualified to be a 'factory workers' but not necessarily qualified to be a 'free range workers' - as in not qualified to work with the youth of today. They feel that teachers need to be current with the changes that are happening in society, and remain educated in that respect.

The teachers attributed their knowingsness and currency with society and the students lived realities to their teaching approach and deep connection with their students. They believed that by: meeting the students at their level initially; speaking to them less formally; knowing about current events that interest them; and being able to engage them through interests such as graffiti art; and speaking about their other cultures like gang life; went a long way towards creating a bond and connectedness with their students. Bell (2011) states that it is important for an educator to invite *all* of the students' cultures into the classroom. These cultures may be gang culture, rugby culture or graffiti culture. Bell (2011) believes that it is only when a student feels accepted and welcomed with all of their cultures into the classroom (without judgement) that they will feel a sense of belonging and, only then a connection can be created (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bruner, 1999).

After creating that initial bond with the students the teacher participants stated that they would then begin to speak more formally, introduce them to routine, discipline, and structure. They described this approach as working best for engaging the students as it 'hooked them in'. The students described that once feeling a sense of belonging and connection to the learning environment they would then respect routine, structure, and discipline. The teacher participants identified that expecting a behavioural challenging learner to come into a new learning environment, and be bombarded with rules and expectations, was not

the best way to start out with that student. The teacher participants expressed that in creating a connection with students not to initially be too concerned with the rules, structure, and discipline – like we are taught to do in teacher education. Their suggestion was to be relaxed, have fun, get to know them, and for them to know you. It is not wasted time, but rather bonding time that goes a long way towards creating connectedness within the learning environment. These teachers demonstrated that they knew how to manage their classrooms to promote learning, identified by Te Kotahitanga as *whakapiringatanga* (Bishop, 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2009)

The statements and approaches to creating connectedness with learners link with Te Kotahitanga and their six observable ways that teachers demonstrate a culturally responsive, and appropriate context for their students. *Ako*, *wānanga* and *manaakitanga* feature highly in the teacher narratives and their approaches to creating connectedness. The teachers know their students well, know what works, know how to create connectedness, and how to make their students feeling safe in their learning environments (Bishop, 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2009). Bell (2011), in her eight features of culturally responsive pedagogy, highlights that culturally responsive teaching involves forming relationships, and that relationships are key in the engagement of our Māori learners (Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004).

The teacher participants and director identified high expectations for their students' behaviour and academic work, after the initial connection had been achieved. They expect from their students: high attendance; strong work ethic; respect both within the course, and out in the community during trips; as well as a high standard of academic work. Both Bell (2011), and Bishop & Berryman (2009) highlight the need for teachers to have high expectations/ *mana motuhake* for their students, not expectations based on stereotypes. Bruner (1999) in the tenet of identity and self-esteem discusses how important education is to the formation of self, what we think about ourselves and our potential for learning and achieving. In having high expectations, routine, and discipline the alternative education teachers felt that the students met them at

their benchmarks, and thrived off having expectations and routine, this was identified as contributing to the students self-efficacy.

The alternative education teacher participants were of the opinion that anyone is capable of achieving. It was explained by the teacher participants that the students were referred with 'behaviour lists a book long', but to these teachers this didn't matter. They viewed this book as someone else's perception of events and views of that student. If we all carried around a book of all our wrong doings then we would never get a fresh start, or be able to move forward, without constant judgement – so this made perfect sense. The teacher participants placed importance on what they could do to help 'step them up'. Teacher 1 stated that it was important that her students saw her supporting them 100% and not judging them on past experiences - something that the students identified that lacked in their mainstream schooling experience. Students believed that they were heavily judged in mainstream, and once they had misbehaved once, then they would always be under the spot light.

In dealing with poor behaviour the teacher participants stated that the students are used to getting yelled at constantly, therefore their strategy in dealing with poor behaviour was the opposite to yelling. They allow their students to take some time out to then come back and have a conversation about their behaviour and/or the situation. Teacher 1 identified that you need to react differently to what they know, to have a deep understanding of the students, their behaviours and lived realities. Student 2 explained how the teacher lets her go off and release her anger, to then come back and have a conversation about it. This student emphasised that she would always come back but needed time to calm down, think, and reflect before talking about it. The students spoke about valuing this strategy for behaviour management. Unlike their experiences of secondary school where the students felt challenged by the teachers when they were upset or angry. The student participants explained that the teachers wouldn't allow them space, would stand over them, and challenge them in their most vulnerable of moments blaming them for the resulting outbursts.

The connectedness that the students feel in the alternative education environment even in their most vulnerable times is amplified throughout this theme. It is evident through student narrative that the centre practices, and teacher practices are the driving force to their students' connectedness and self-efficacy within the alternative-education, learning environment. What is also evident through all three participant group narratives is that the teachers in this centre have a deep understanding of their Māori students: their lived realities; their likes and dislikes; their behaviours, and how to effectively manage it; how to connect with these priority learners; and how to prepare them for their future goals and ambitions. The alternative education teachers could be described as culturally responsive practitioners who are professionally committed to their position as an educator, and who care for their students as culturally located human beings (Bell, 2011; Bishop 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004).

### **Connection with Māori**

Do you feel that the Māori students enjoy attending alternative education, and if so why?

*Director: "Yes, yes I do".*

*Teacher 1: "We have a lot of talented kids, and a lot of talent does shine through. But society looks at them and looks down on them because of their skin colour. They think that it's just another criminal on their way to prison. But they don't see that the student is actually step 6 in numeracy or can play the guitar. There is a lot of false perception out in the wider world. Those stereotypes are creating a lot of negative statistics for our youth. The Māori students love attending here because we unearth those talents and let them shine like a star".*

*Teacher 1: "A lot of the kids that I have felt that they were bullied in mainstream by teachers, they really enjoy it here because it is the opposite".*

*Teacher 2: "Yeah bullied by the teachers".*

*Teacher 1: "They felt that they weren't listened too, that they were bullied, especially my Māori students".*

*Teacher 2: "Especially certain colleges".*

*Teacher 1: "Once you get the students on board they really open up to what really happen for them at school. And there is a lot of gnarly stuff that goes on".*

*Teacher 2: "They like it here because they see you going into bat for them and giving them merit where merit is due. Like they will see that Matua is trying to help them find a job, they mentally note that, and that is another strong way of building trust. Windows of opportunity will present themselves during the days and weeks, and a wise practitioner will spot those windows, that maybe you don't have to send that person home, maybe you can pause on that work a different more appropriate tailor made response – that builds huge trust".*

Do you connect with Whānau and if so how is that done?

*Teacher 1: "Whānau days, lunch, social activities".*

*Teacher 2: "Whānau know that they can come and go at any time. I'm constantly on the phone massaging those relationships. I will visit homes".*

*Teacher 1: "I have several parents that I contact on a weekly basis. I ring up and say your son or daughter has achieved this, this week and they are amping. We contact about positives just as much as negatives. Even if we have to ring about a negative we will always highlight the positives of that week also. Making it known that they are actually doing well".*

*Teacher 1: "I did a phone call last week to a family and she bluntly said to me that she thought that her son was just skipping house for the day. She said that she didn't realise that he was attending course. I said that I was just ringing up to let them know what he had achieved and the credits that he had done and she was so excited".*

Do you feel that Māori students' parents would want them to succeed academically?

*Teacher 1: "Yeah, I think despite what's happening at home every parent wants their children to achieve. I haven't come across a whānau yet that doesn't want their child to succeed".*

*Teacher 2: "They all want their kids to do well".*

*Teacher 1: "I actually find that my Māori families are more open and reactive when they find that their students are achieving compared to a Pākehā family. A Pākehā family is like ok that's cool, I'm glad that's happening. But you know with a Māori family they really celebrate it, they want the regular phone calls to hear how their student is doing".*

Do you think that your Māori students are connected to the alternative education environment?

*Teacher 2: "They are not connected to this location, or venue but they are connected to our environment. They are addicted to it".*

*Teacher 1: "A lot of our Māori kids are not directly from here, and come from other areas but feel connected to here".*

*Teacher 1: "They are our highest attenders. From my side I have majority of Māori students and I have really good attendance for my Māori students. I can't fault their attendance and attitudes they are engaged more than the other students".*

*Teacher 2: "With Māori and being Māori myself it's about the whakawhanaungatanga – it's like the bros or the sisters are there. We are a part of the clan. We have created a community. Obviously we are the senior roles of that clan but what Māori thrive on, is the social context and that we are more than just a course".*

Do you help Māori students who are disconnected from their whakapapa, reconnect with it?

*Teacher 2: "Well I rang up one of the mums and I said 'oi your boy doesn't know where he is from' and then she flicked it out to me in a hurry".*

*Teacher 1: "They need to find their identity and they need to understand their identity. The ones who struggle to find an identity, we create an identity for who they are now".*

*Teacher 2: "For me it is really important that they know".*

Do you feel that alternative education has helped Māori students to make personal changes?

*Teacher 1: "A lot of the kids that come in have an addiction. We identify those addictions and then provide them with the right services to help. Ones that are going through depression or are cutting, we can link them up to mentoring services. There is also drug and alcohol services and a range of services that we can bring in to help pull the kids out of their darkness. Then when that happens you watch them, they start to turn into little butterfly's aye".*

*Teacher 2: "Schools don't handle the way that these students are. I mean what if a student has an F Bomb moment then it's like – you, you're gone. Whereas we can manage through that and get the waka paddling in the right direction again. We won't let an F Bomb moment determine the rest of their lives we all have moments like that".*

*Teacher 2: "In less than 12 months you notice the changes, it's quick".*

*Teacher 2: "We haven't even finished Term 1 yet and the students are already making massive changes in their attitude and personal lives".*

Through creating a community of learners Māori students are able to thrive within the alternative education environment. Māori look out for each other (Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004), and this social aspect and community of learners is what has been identified to be missing in mainstream education for the student participants (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop et al., 2003). Māori function best when working within a



community of learners, where they are able to support and work with each other (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2003; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004; Te Ara, 2016). Connectedness for Māori within the learning environment encompasses the concepts of whakapapa and whenua, creating a sense of family, relationships, kinship and connection – similar to that connection a person has with their own family (Bishop, 2005; Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, 2016; Te Ara, 2016). What the teachers in the alternative education environment seem to do well is create a whānau environment for their students. Both the student and teacher participants speak of feeling that they are a part of a whānau.

The teachers discussed the fact that once you get the students on board they really open up to them about what happened for them at school. The teacher participants reported a lot of gnarly stuff that goes on in regards to the treatment of these students, the exercising of authority, and bullying that the students have been subjected to. The alternative education teacher participants felt that most mainstream educators don't really care about all the little components that make up each person, they felt that they only care about the 'factory', that is only producing graduates. The question that can come from this is is there too much pressure for our mainstream teachers to produce graduates? Regardless of the pressures, as suggested by the teaching participants, graduates will be produced if the right learning environment is created (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2005; 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2009).

The three participant groups spoke of the connection between the alternative-education, learning environment and the students' families, and how the families were engaged with the learning environment. The alternative education centre runs whānau days and social activities. The teacher participants stated that whānau know that they can come and go at any time, and that they are constantly on the phone massaging the relationships with whānau, as well as making home visits. It is in these forming of relationships that a wider connection is built between the alternative-education, learning environment, the students and the whānau, creating a sense of belonging for all, and a pride in the learning

environment (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004). By these teachers building relationships and communications with families, and communities of students, they are practicing culturally responsive teaching as suggested by Bell (2011), Bishop (2012), and Bishop & Berryman (2009).

Another way that the teacher participants provide connectedness and belonging for their students, is by helping them to connect to their *whakapapa*. It was identified that most students that come into alternative education were unaware of their whakapapa for various reasons. For example, some were not bought up by their biological parents. The teacher participants expressed that they felt it important that these students find and understand their identity. For the ones who struggle to find an identity, the teachers help create an identity for who they are now. In a Māori worldview, connection to whenua and tribal links are important as Māori consider themselves people of the land, Māori connect with oneself and each other through land and whakapapa (Te Ara, 2016). For a student not to have a connection to their whenua, in a Māori worldview this would be very unsettling – which could go towards explaining certain behaviours that these students exhibit (Bishop, 2005; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004; Te Ara, 2016). For these teachers to know and understand the importance of their Māori students knowing their whakapapa so that their students have a sense of wholeness and connectedness, amplifies these teachers' professional commitment, and care to their students' wellbeing (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2009).

### **Pathways, Mana and Self-efficacy**

I asked the Director if many of their alternative education student's transition into their YG programme.

*Director: "We put them into YG at 15y 6m and if they are attending well and looking to stay on we transition them. We probably have about 70%*

*going through to that programme, and then from that group we have probably got 90% who stay in the YG programme beyond turning 16”.*

In both the teacher focus group and Director interview I asked what happens to the students who finish alternative education, and do not transition into the YG programme.

*Director: “Generally work, we do assist with that if that is where they are wanting to head”.*

*Teacher 1: “They get encouraged to go through to YG. There is always a transition, you find the best fit solution or transition for the student”.*

*Director: “If a kid is capable or able to do the unit standards then we put them into the YG course so that they are able to work towards or complete level 1”.*

*Teacher 2: “There is a connection between the courses and programmes. It’s a great part of the mix for the students”.*

The students said to me that they were all working towards Level 1 NCEA, therefore I asked them how they were getting on with that.

*Student 1: “Excited. Well not excited to leave AE but excited to go to a higher level”.*

*Student 2: “Yeah I’m excited. Feeling good, f\*\*\*en mint as”.*

*Student 3: “The teachers give us confidence”.*

*Student 2: “I feel quite good and positive and motivated because I got told a lot of times at school that I would never ever achieve any credits at all”.*

*Student 1: “Hard”.*

*Student 2: “But my teacher here taught me how to believe in myself and she pushes me to do the work. No matter what emotional state I’m in – she will make me do it”.*

I asked the students if they had any career goals since attending alternative education.

*Student 1: "I want to be a builder... my teacher has already given me courses that I can do to achieve that stuff".*

I asked if she had that support at secondary school, her response was *"Nup. They were just like, pffft"*.

*Student 2: "I'm actually working towards applying for a course, a beautician course at the Poly, starting in July. I will get there with my teachers help".*

*Student 3: "I want to work in a beauty salon, I've always loved hair and make-up".*

*Student 4: "I want to be a mechanic".*

I asked where all this ambition came from?

*Student 4: "Our teacher here".*

*Student 2: "She has a better understanding of us".*

*Student 4: "I didn't even know what I wanted to be a month ago, and my teacher helped me figure it out. Just going to finish my Level 1's and then go from there".*

*Student 3: "I always wanted to be a vet person and my primary teacher was like 'do you know how many years you got to do to do that... do you even know how much work you got to put into that?' 'I don't think you can do it'".*

*Student 3: "I was adamant to do that until that teacher told me that, that day. I remember it like it was just a minute ago".*

*Student 1: "So yeah she like basically put you down like you couldn't do that – and look at you know".*

An identified strength of this organisation is that they can provide pathways for their alternative education students within the organisation. The organisation is accredited to deliver NCEA level 1 and 2 credits to their students, on the same

site they have a Youth Guarantee programme. It was identified that alternative education students are offered the opportunity to pathway into the Youth Guarantee programme, which has been identified to be very successful for these students - with the Director noting high achievement and completion rates.

What we can take from the student narratives within this theme is that Māori students success comes down to the connectedness that they feel with their teachers, and their learning environment (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman 2009; Te Ara, 2016). From feeling connected to their learning environment, being a part of a learning community, and experiencing success their self-efficacy grows and develops. One of the ways that this is evidenced is that all of the students interviewed now have career aspirations, and are feeling confident about following through with their career goals since attending alternative education. Something which they identified did not having in the mainstream secondary school environment. The student participants speak of believing in themselves, and their ability to be able to be successful in both NCEA and their career path, a feeling which they didn't have in secondary school.

## **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings from the data collected from both the focus group interviews and the one-to-one interviews. The findings sat within three main themes, however, had multiple sub-themes to give coherence to the data being presented. Discussion on the findings within each theme linked heavily to the themes and dialogue within the literature review, contained in chapter 2. Chapter 5 seeks to draw conclusions from this study, present any limitations encountered, and make recommendations for future studies.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### Whakataukī

*Te Timatanga o te mātauranga ko te wahangū, te wāhanga tuarua ko te whakarongo.*

*The first stage of learning is silence, the second stage is listening.*

### Overview

This chapter seeks to draw conclusions from the study directly answering the research question: In what ways do the perceptions of connectedness of Māori students in alternative education secondary schools affect their self-efficacy within the learning environment? Limitations of the research are also discussed, and recommendations for future research are presented.

### Concluding the Study

I open the conclusion of this study with what some will consider to be a bold statement: educators seriously impact their students' mana and future educational direction either positively and/or negatively through their choice of teaching practices, actions, and dialogue with their students. The narratives of the student participants within this study support such a statement. From the findings of this study I can conclude that there are six ways in which teachers can help create *connectedness* within their learning environments, and therefore improve their Māori students' *self-efficacy*. These are identified as: Culturally responsive practice; relational practice; flexibility; creating a sense of belonging and whānau; creating high trust; and being non-judgemental.

Although the student sample size of this study was small, with only five students interviewed, their perceptions and experiences were the same despite attending different mainstream secondary schools. The student participants shared

perceptions of experiences in both the mainstream learning environment, and the alternative-education, learning environment. The student participants expressed feeling a sense of belonging, connectedness and self-efficacy to their primary school learning environment. However, these perceptions of experiences changed drastically when the student participants reflected on their mainstream intermediate, and secondary school learning environments.

Similar perceptions and experiences encountered during their primary school years were close to that of their experiences of the alternative education environment. The students identified similar key themes in relation to their experiences and enjoyment of primary school, as they did with the alternative education centre. Te Kotahitanga student narratives identified the most important influences on Māori students' achievement to be: increased caring; raised expectations; improved classroom management; moving from traditional to discursive classroom interactions; less focus on student behaviour and more on student learning and how they learn (Bishop et al., 2003). The findings from the Te Kotahitanga research project were consistent with the findings from this study.

This study identified further important influences to be: trust; whānau; relational practice; flexibility; creating a sense of belonging; and being non-judgemental. The differences between these two studies was that Te Kotahitanga focused on factors to improve Māori student achievement, whereas this study sought to explore connectedness for Māori students within the learning environment. Connectedness in this study has been evidenced through the narratives of the participants to be *the critical factor* to these students educational success. Concluding that if you create the right environment the learning will happen – which is evidenced in this study. The focus need not be on improving the achievement rates of Māori, but rather on teachers creating connectedness with Māori, as once connectedness is achieved, then academic success will follow.

Why did the perceptions of experience change for these students in mainstream intermediate and secondary school? The narratives seemed to focus heavily on a

system that still does not cater for Māori learners, or rather learners that do not fit the 'square box' as described by the teacher participants. Narratives also discussed teachers who lack the ability to seek a connection with these students, who exercise deficit theorising, and who are not culturally responsive. These findings are similar to that of the conclusions drawn from the student narratives within the Te Kotahitanga project, where the major influence on Māori students' educational achievement lies in the mind and actions of their teacher (Bishop et al., 2003). Therefore, in the interests of moving forward the identified strengths of teacher practices from within primary school and alternative-education, learning environments, and how they create connectedness with their Māori students should be explored further.

To just identify teachers in the mainstream education system as the reason for these students feeling disconnected would be foolish, as the student participants identified at least one connection with a mainstream secondary school educator (Bishop et al., 2003). Much of the narratives focused on perceptions of a system that is still geared for a Eurocentric style of teaching and learning. A *factory* that produces graduates, rather than an environment that is connected, caring and flexible, and able to cater for all learners, as suggested by the teacher participants. This gives rise to the claims of an education debt being owed to Māori, and may reopen conversations about resolving the education debt (Bishop, 2005, 2008, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006). The experiences that Māori students are still facing within mainstream secondary school learning environments are the same as what was identified by the Te Kotahitanga research project (Bell, 2011; Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop et al., 2003). Moving forward, inquiry into how mainstream intermediate and secondary schools could achieve connectedness, flexibility, trust, and strengthen relational and culturally responsive practice to cater for their Māori learners, would be highly beneficial (Bell, 2011). This may mean exploring an education debt, policy, teacher education, and/ or reassessing expectations of teachers and student performance.



It was identified through the narratives of the students, teachers, and the Director, and supported by relevant literature, that connectedness for Māori within the learning environment encompasses the following concepts: trust, flexibility, social, high expectations, whānau, whanaungatanga, whakapapa, and whenua (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop et al., 2014; Bishop et al., 2003; Te Ara, 2016). Creating a sense of family, relationships, kinship and connection – similar to that connection a person has with their own family (Bishop, 2005; Kidman, 2012; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004; Reilly, 2003; Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, 2016; Te Ara, 2016). Quality student/teacher relationships have been evidenced in this study through participant narratives, and in a previous alternative education review to be strengths of the alternative education environment (Education Review office, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2009a). It is integral for Māori to establish connections with others and their environment in forming and building relationships – whanaungatanga. The other importance is the value of *social* and *cultural* interactions within the learning environment. Learners being able to bring themselves culturally into the classroom are seen as vital to their success, and connectedness to an environment – cultural responsiveness (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 2005, 2010; Bruner, 1999; Ministry of Education, 2009a; Vygotsky, 1978).

Similar to the student narratives in Te Kotahitanga the students in this study identified that by the teachers getting to know them, and their lived realities, was how the connectedness began to form (Bishop et al., 2003). The alternative education teachers spoke of rejecting deficit theorising and students' past behaviours, and working to understand their individual students to be able to bring about change for them. This was also a key conclusion from the Te Kotahitanga project (Bishop et al., 2003). The student participants spoke of feeling judged and racially discriminated against in their intermediate and secondary school learning environments. For them this created a sense of disconnect and low self-worth, however, the non-judgemental approach of the alternative education teachers helped to create a sense of trust, belonging, self-efficacy, and whānau.

What does need to change, and what I hope that this thesis endeavours to present at the request of the alternative education students, is the stigma of the alternative education environment among education professionals and society. What is communicated to students, parents and whānau within mainstream schools is that the alternative education environment is an undesirable place to be. Contrary to belief and societal perception the alternative-education, learning environment was described by the teachers, the Director, and student participants, as a safe, supportive, academic space for second chance, and priority learners. This is further supported by a Ministry of Education report (2009a) which identified 100% student satisfaction with the alternative-education, learning environment (Education Review Office, 2011; 2016a). It is a space where students feel a sense of belonging and achievement, feel valued and cared for, and where self-efficacy is fostered – and through this their mana grows. This particular alternative education centre is highly functioning with high student satisfaction. It is suggested that researchers and educationalists explore the effectiveness of these types of learning environments in the hope to be able to transfer effective practices into the mainstream space.

Whether teachers acknowledge the important role that their mind and actions, and culture play within their teaching practices or not, literature heavily supports the notion that culture is an important aspect, to not only consider within teaching practices, but to also be active in (Bell, 2011; Bishop et al., 2009). Bell (2011) suggests that after a teacher understands their own cultural position, that the teacher then needs to understand the culture of the students in their classroom to create that *connectedness*. What the teachers of the alternative education environment create through culturally responsive teaching is a place where their students can bring themselves culturally, and be made to feel proud of who they are and where they come from (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Macfarlane & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2004; Te Ara, 2016). The culture of care extends beyond students just being able to bring themselves into the class culturally, these teachers actively work with students who have an unknown identity, to locate their identity and whakapapa (Te Ara,

2016). Could educators do more within their mainstream learning environments to help their Māori student connect with, and understand their whakapapa?

To conclude, the alternative-education, learning environment within this study has been evidenced through the participant narratives to create connectedness, which has positively affected their Māori learners' self-efficacy. This can be attributed to 1) the *management* style of the centre, a style which puts the students at the heart of their decisions, addresses barriers to learning and attendance, and who are financially invested in helping their students. 2) The *teachers* whose passion is motivated by helping the students grow and develop, who are clearly not in it for the money or the hours required of them, but because they live and breathe what they do. The teachers quite clearly know and understand their students, which contributes to how they target their teaching and learning approaches (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop et al., 2003). Essentially, what is created within this alternative-education, learning environment is connectedness through a whānau approach, and this is driven by the people - he tangata, he tangata, he tangata.

### **Limitations of this Research**

Cohen et al. (2011) explain the benefit of using both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection, in terms of being able to cross-reference and triangulate data. Consistency in the findings between different data sources helps ensure validity (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005). Initially, I had planned to use a mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods to be able to triangulate data. However, after consultation with the student participants they suggested a restructure to some of the planned data collection methods.

Therefore, this study only used qualitative data collection methods through the use of focus group interviews, and one-to-one semi-structured interviews. Some researchers may perceive the fact that the students did not want to complete the survey as a limitation. However, I viewed this as a positive, as the students

became more active in the research process after listening to their recommendations (Cram, 2009; Smith 1999). The students were more than willing to have korero with me, and strongly suggested this preference over completing the survey. Relying only on qualitative methods for data collection is said to be less effective, as the ability to be able to triangulate data is lessened. I felt that triangulation of the data was still achieved within this study as I was able to triangulate the narratives from all three participant groups with research findings from both the Te Kotahitanga project narratives, and the Education Review Office report on alternative education practices (Bishop et al., 2003; Cohen et al., 2011; Education Review Office, 2010; Mutch, 2005).

My position as an insider researcher, in regards to researching children, posed ethical and methodological dilemmas. Therefore, I had to prepare for potential issues before conducting interviews with the student participants. Palmer (2006) suggests that insider researchers, researching children, hold a power imbalance and that the relationship between the researcher and the participants can become complicated. In this instance the insider researcher is more likely to be in a position of power (Palmer, 2006). I conducted a focus group with the student participants rather than one-to-one semi-structured interviews so that the potential power imbalance might be counteracted - by greater student representation.

Another limitation was the sample size of the participants interviewed. The data collected was from one highly functioning alternative education centre with high student numbers compared to other alternative education centres nationally. This particular alternative education centre has strong business resourcing, philosophy and pedagogy – this may not be the case for all alternative education centres as discussed with the Director in her interview. Therefore, I cannot conclude that all student experiences of alternative education across New Zealand will be the same or similar as the student participants interviewed in this study.

## **Recommendations for future research**

Further research into the alternative-education, learning environment and the use of larger, broader-based representative samples would be recommended. This would better enable a stronger representation of alternative education Māori students' voice. Further to this, research that includes whānau voice of the alternative education students and relational aspects between leadership in the school and in the iwi would contribute to the alternative education research space.

The student participants and Police Officer participant identified the need for students to have more choice over where they are educated, as mainstream secondary education does not fit all students. If students were able to have the option to choose their education wider than the public secondary school sector, and find an environment that suited their needs this may improve Māori students' educational success. The advantages of Private Training Establishments, Charter Schools, Polytechnics, and Institutes of Technology where there are offerings of Youth Guarantee programmes, Level 1-3 certificates, and NCEA offerings are some examples of alternative options to be explored.

Research into policies for the public sector in regards to equitable education and Māori in education, and research into more flexibility within the secondary sector should be undertaken. More flexibility within the mainstream system – how can this be achieved? Schools are self-governing so how might this be achieved? While schools are still pitching their culture to the masses and Eurocentric audience changes would be difficult, how could this be achieved?

Further research needs to be conducted around the questions: Have we as a society really moved on from deficit theorising? And how do we achieve this as a society? This was a concern shared by all participants including the Police Officer participant who witnesses racial discrimination often. He identified that Police Officers continue to discriminate against Māori, this is a wider issue than

education, it is a societal issue that needs to be explored further. A similar theme that sits with this is: Do we have a cultural class in New Zealand? similar to the historical class system in England (Fox, 1842). Addressing the wider cultural problems that are faced within society will in turn positively affect education for our Māori students, hence why I recommend these themes for further exploration and research.

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## Te Reo Māori Glossary

Aroha	To love, feel compassion, empathise
Aroha nui	With deep affection
Hapū	A sub-tribe of an iwi
He tangata	The people
Hui	Meeting, to gather
Iwi	A large group of people who descend from a common ancestor associated with a distinct area
Kura	School, education
Māori	Indigenous people of New Zealand
Mana	Prestige, power, influence, status
Marae	Formal meeting place where formal greetings and discussions take place
Mātauranga	Knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
Rangatahi	Youth
Tipuna	Ancestor, grandparent
Tāhuhu Kōrero	History
Tikanga	The customary system of values and practices that have developed over time
Tūrangawaewae	A place to stand
Wānanga	To meet and discuss
Whānau	Family group, extended family
Whakapapa	Genealogy
Whakawhanaungatanga	Establishing relationships
Whenua	Land
Whanaungatanga	Relationship, kinship, sense of belonging

Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary (2016).



# Appendices

## **Appendix A: Student Focus Group Questions**

### **Student Focus Group Questions**

**Guide to Questions for students, responses from the student survey may alter the questions:**

#### **Section 1: Experiences of School environment**

(23 minutes – 21 minutes response time & 2 min reading questions and preparation)

##### **1. What was primary school like for you? (7 minutes)**

*Possible Probes*

- Did you feel connected/involved with things to your primary school(s)?
- Did you feel connected/involved with things and valued by your teachers?
- What was the environment like?
- How did it feel?

##### **2. What was secondary school like for you? (7 Minutes)**

*Possible Probes*

- Did you feel connected/involved with things to your secondary school(s)?
- Did you feel connected/involved with things to and valued by your teachers?
- What was the environment like?
- How did it feel?

##### **3. What do you think about education in New Zealand for Māori students? (7 minutes)**

*Possible Probes*

- Why do you feel this way?
- Could it be better?
- Do you feel that Māori students are disadvantaged?

#### **Section 2: Experiences of Alternative Education environment**

(37 minutes – 32 minutes response time & 5 min reading questions and preparation)

##### **1. Describe the alternative education environment. (9 minutes)**

*Possible Probes*

- How does the typical day go at AE?
- What are some of the rituals/ routines?
- What does it feel like being in this environment?
- Do you feel connected to the environment? If so how?

##### **2. Do you enjoy attending Alternative Education? (9 minutes)**

*Possible Probes*

- Do you feel connected to and valued by your teachers?

- Do you achieve academically at Alternative Education?
- Why do you choose to attend/ show up to alternative education?
- Has alternative education helped you to make personal changes?
- What is the best thing about AE?
- Do you feel good about yourself at AE? Why/ Why not?

**3. Has your referring school supported you, at school, instead of referring you to Alternative Education? (9 minutes)**

*Possible Probes*

- What could the referring school have done better to help you succeed at school?
- Have your referring school taken an interest in your attendance and achievements at Alternative Education?

**4. What is the difference between the school environment and the alternative education environment? (5 minutes)**

*Possible Probe*

- If you could suggest any changes to the secondary school environment what would they be?
- Any further comments or questions?

## **Appendix B: Teachers Focus Group Questions**

### **Semi Structured Interview Questions for the Teachers**

#### **Guide to questions for the teachers:**

(60 minutes – 56 minutes responses & 4 minutes preparation and questions)

#### **1. Describe the alternative education environment and transition process (18 minutes)**

##### *Possible Probes*

- What is the process once a student is referred?
- How do you connect the students when they first enter the environment?
- Do you connect the whānau to the environment? If so, what?
- How does the typical day go at AE?
- What are some of the rituals/ routines? Teaching practices?
- Do you feel that the Māori students are connected to the environment?
- Why do you think the students show up?

#### **2. Do you feel that the Māori students enjoy attending Alternative Education? (18 minutes)**

##### *Possible Probes*

- Do you think that your Māori students feel connected to and valued by the teachers?
- Do your Māori students achieve academically?
- Has alternative education helped your Māori students to make personal changes?
- What support systems are in place?
- Do you notice a shift in your Māori student's attitude and mana after attending AE?
- What happens to the connection when they turn 16 and no longer qualify for AE?

#### **3. Could the referring school have supported the student, at school, instead of referring them to Alternative Education? (10 minutes)**

##### *Possible Probes*

- If so, what could the referring school have done better?
- Does the referring school take an interest in the student's attendance and achievements?
- What are some of the things that the students vocalise about their referring school or school experiences?

#### **4. What is the difference between the school environment and the alternative education environment? (10 minutes)**

##### *Possible Probe*

- If you could suggest any changes to the secondary school environment what would the

## **Appendix C: Semi Structured Interview Questions - Director**

### **Semi Structured Interview Questions for the Director**

#### **Guide to questions for the Director:**

(60 minutes – 56 minutes responses & 4 minutes preparation and questions)

#### **1. Tell me about the 'big picture' of alternative education? (14 minutes)**

##### *Possible Probes*

- What are the philosophies/ aims and intentions of this AE centre?
- How many funded positions do you have?
- Name the feeder schools and the places allocated to them (this will be kept confidential)
- What funding do you see per student?
- What funding does the school receive for their alternative education student while they are at your centre?
- Do you feel that funding is enough?
- What are the support systems like for AE students, and who supplies these (counselling etc.)?

#### **2. Do you feel that the Māori students enjoy attending alternative education? (14 minutes)**

##### *Possible Probes*

- How does the typical day go?
- What are some of the routines/ rituals?
- Do you feel that the Māori students are connected to the environment?
- Do you feel that the Māori students are valued by your teachers?
- Do the Māori students achieve academically? Is there an academic focus?
- Do you feel that alternative education has helped Māori students make personal changes?
- Are the Māori students helped to pathway into society after they finish AE? (Work, higher ed)
- What sort of connection do you have with the students?
- How much whānau involvement is there?

#### **3. Tell me about the process of enrolment and engagement with the referring schools? (14 minutes)**

##### *Possible Probes*

- What is the transition process like between school and AE?
- Could the process be better?

- Are students referred as a 'simple solution'? Students that possibly should have been kept in school?
- Do you get parents trying to refer their children to AE (Bypassing the school process)? If so why?
- Generally what are the identified 'issues' that students are referred for?
- Does the referring school take an interest in their students' attendance and achievements at Alternative Education?
- Do the referring schools work with the AE centre to transition students back to school?
- How much involvement does each feeder school have?

**4. What is the difference between the school environment and the alternative education environment? (14 minutes)**

*Possible Probe*

- If you could suggest any changes for the secondary school environment to help maintain these students, what would they be?
- What do you see the future of AE?
- What makes AE unique?
- Any further comments?

## **Appendix D: Semi Structured Interview Questions - Police Officer**

### **Semi structured interview questions for the Police Officer**

#### **Guide to questions for the Police Officer:**

(60 minutes – 56 minutes responses & 4 minutes preparation and questions)

**1. Tell me about your connection with the alternative education centre and it's students  
(14 Minutes)**

*Possible Probes*

- How much involvement have you had with the centre?
- How does your line of work connect with the centre?
- Is it important for you and your position that you have a connection with the centre and the students and their whānau?
- How has your relationship changed and/ or evolved with the students after they start attending alternative education?
- What's your opinion around the benefit of the centre for the Māori students?

**2. Do you feel that the Māori students enjoy attending alternative education? (14 minutes)**

*Possible Probes*

- Being involved in the environment yourself, how do you feel AE is for these students?
- Of the students that you work with outside of the AE centre do you see positive changes in their behaviour out in the community after they start attending AE? If so, what?

**3. Through your experiences and own cultural knowledge, how important do you believe connection is for Māori students? (14 minutes)**

*Possible Probes*

- Connection to self
- Connection to whānau
- Connection to their school/ education
- Connection to their community
- Connection to society

**4. Could a lack of *connection* go towards explaining youth offending? (14 minutes)**

*Possible Probes*

- Reflecting on youth that you have worked with
- What effect does education have on these youth